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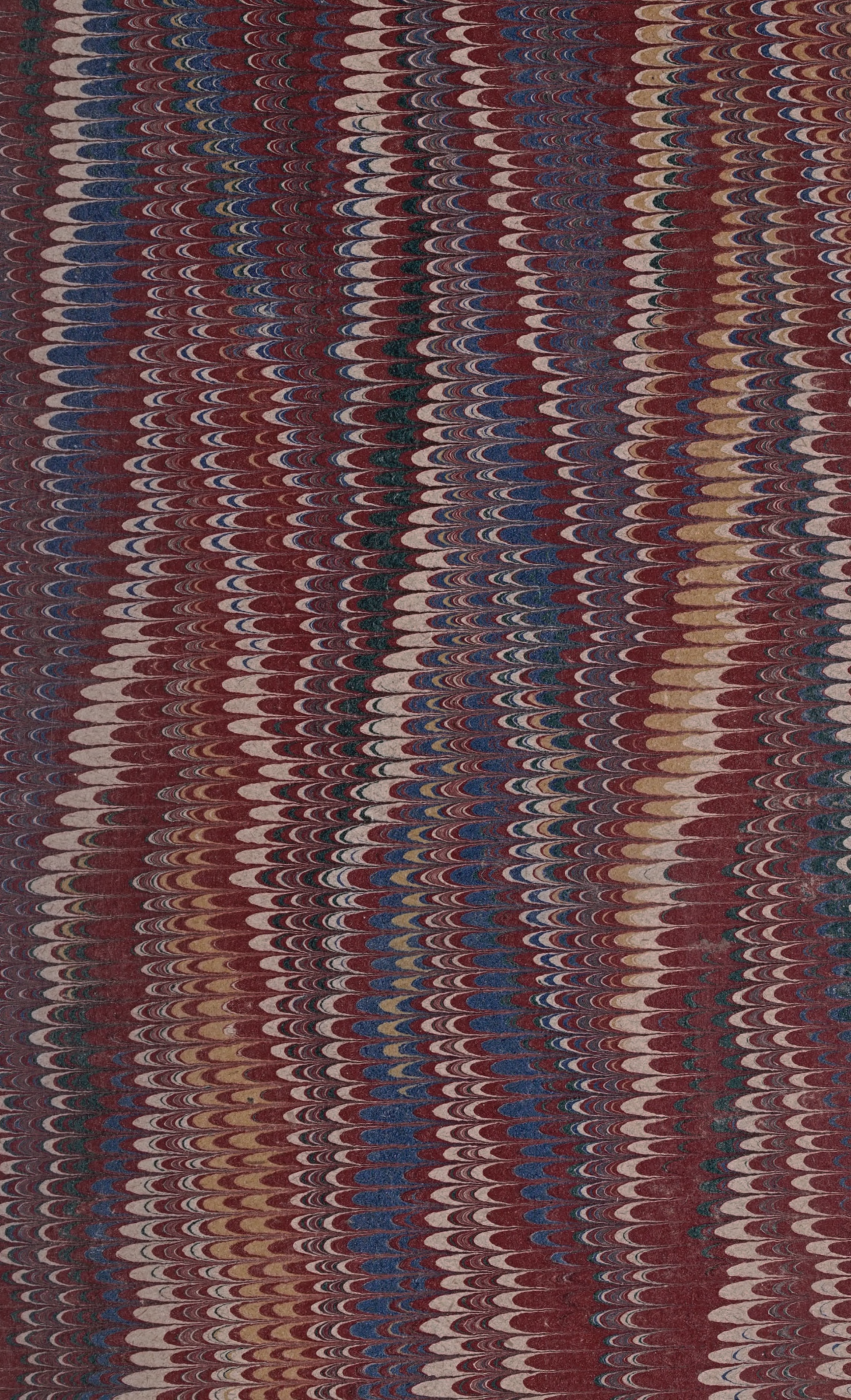
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By MARY E. BRYAN.

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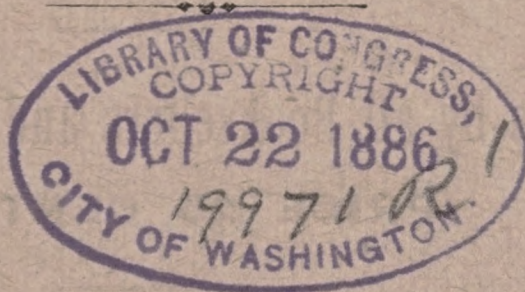
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BY MARY E. BRYAN,

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AUTHOR OF "THE BAYOU BRIDE," "THE FUGITIVE BRIDE," ETC.

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# KILDEE;

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## The Sphinx of the Red House.

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### CHAPTER I.

THE afternoon was fine; the bay in the distance sparkled in the sunshine, a light sea breeze played with the gray moss-beards of the live oaks. Ochiltree race-track—two miles out from the old city of Wallport—was in good condition—the dust laid by a hard shower the day before.

It was only four o'clock, but a number of worshipers of horse flesh were showing off their fast trotters attached to light buggies that fairly spun around the course. The foremost of these vehicles was drawn by a span of ponies—clean-limbed fellows that lifted their feet in thorough-bred style. He who handled the reins with graceful nonchalance was Miles Carleon, owner of the race-track and of the finest turf horses in the State. He was over thirty, but did not look so; he carried his medium-height, compact figure with easy assurance; he was fair and florid, with chestnut hair in half curls, and a light mustache shading his voluptuous mouth.

“Hold on,” he called out to a groom in front of him who was exercising his favorite horse—a black stallion, with a hint of Tartar blood in his powerful build. “You are worrying Mahmoud, holding him in. Get down and take these reins. I’ll let him out a little; it’s what he’s fretting for.”

He checked the ponies as he spoke, leaped over the



wheels and mounted into the saddle the groom had vacated. As he was about to be off, two young men drove up.

“See here, Carleon,” cried one of them, “I heard you say that Mrs. Montcalm would be at your island party to-morrow; are you certain of it? Be sure of what you say—there’s a bet pending.”

“One is sure of nothing in this world, least of all of what a woman will do,” Carleon answered, turning his head over his shoulder.

“Hold on. Have you heard the report—generally known—that her husband told her she should never enter his house again if she went to Aphrodite Island?”

“Yes.”

“And you believe it?”

“I think it likely.”

“Then it’s no bet, Thornbury. I’ll not throw away money. The fair Laura won’t fool with such a man as Montcalm, I take it. Besides, they say she’s really fond of him. Luckily the bet wasn’t confirmed; so I’ll crawl-fish.”

“I’ll take you up, Thornbury,” Carleon said quietly. “What were the stakes?”

“Only a double ten.”

“Make it a fifty—twice that, if you like.”

“No, thanks. The fifty is all I’ll venture. I’m doubtful of that since I see how confident you seem. But then, I remember your old trick of playing bluff, with not a pair in your hand; so—”

“Well; fifty it stands. Dyke there is witness. Ta-ta. I can’t hold Mahmoud any longer.”

“We’ll manage to keep up with you, Carleon, unless you’re going to let that brute out,” called one of the horse-men who had just ridden up.

“I *am* going to let him out, and not on the course either. I’ve business in town this minute. I’ll see you all to-night.”



He wheeled the horse out of the race-track as he spoke and set out at a fast pace along the level, beaten road that led to the city.

“Splendid animals—both of them,” Thornbury commented, looking after the horse and rider. “Business, indeed! I’ll wager it’s an appointment with some woman.”

“I don’t know,” answered Dyke. “Carleon’s showing shrewd business sense of late; keeps things pretty well in hand, and is piling up the shekels. Shouldn’t wonder if he has an eye to entering the political field.”

“Tell me about him,” said one of the equestrians, riding up to the side of the buggy—a boyish little blue-jacketed midshipman from the United States steamship that lay in port. “I know he’s a tiptop fellow; fine judge of horse-flesh, and wines, and all that; but what else? He owns this race-course, doesn’t he?”

“Yes; and the largest liquor house in Wallport, and the Arcade Gambling Saloon, where you dropped a few dollars last night. Carleon was born to good luck. He ran through one big fortune; and just as the world was clapping its hands and crying out: ‘Here he goes, down—down!’ the see-saw of luck bounced ‘up, up,’ once more. A miserly old aunt left him the half-million she had been starving herself to save.”

“And so he once more rides on the top wave of society?”

“Well, not exactly. Wallport is strait-laced—full of moldy aristocracy. Carleon ran through his character as well as his money, and he didn’t get the former renewed. He’s still a bankrupt in that line. The Bourbon blue blood turns the cold shoulder to him. Papas don’t invite him; mammas draw their pretty charges closer under their wing when he is encountered. Even Mrs. La Rue, who is only a hanger-on to the outskirts of the exclusives, doesn’t pet him openly; she’s afraid to. You see, he is notorious. That little Eden he’s got yonder on Aphrodite Island has always some frail Eve in it. He doesn’t live there, you



know; has handsome rooms at the Bay House; keeps a yacht and fancy sail boats though, to take him where he pleases on the water."

"And who is Mrs. Montcalm?"

"The handsomest woman in Wallport—married to the haughtiest, coldest man. Just now, however, he seems to be courting popular favor; has joined all the societies, speaks on public occasions, bows to people on the streets and shakes hands with them—one can see it goes against the grain for him to do it. It's clear he means to run for office. His elder brother, General Rolff Montcalm, will back him. The general is an old favorite on the political track, you know—an old war-horse, with no end of record, would beat any man now that could be trotted out, only he's retired. He'll give his influence to his younger brother; and if the nominating convention will only—"

"Pray don't give us any politics, Dyke; save all that for your paper," broke in Thornbury.

"Does Mrs. Montcalm belong to the La Rue set?" asked the little midshipman.

"She does and she doesn't. We had her to a few Germans this winter, but of late she is holding back. She has a dull time of it in her home—husband neglectful, morose, neighbors unsocial. She has only been here two years; and the Wallport women of the Bourbon stock are dreadfully cliquish. They do not take kindly to strangers. So there is nothing for belle Laura but to fall into the Sans Souci ring—Mrs. La Rue, Carleon & Co.—who revolve outside the narrow orbit of the exclusives. Mrs. La Rue is witty and kind-hearted, Carleon is captivating, and we, the 'Co.', are innocently diverting. Unfortunately, Mrs. Montcalm's husband doesn't view us in this benevolent light. He objects to our amusing his *cara sposa*; particularly does he object to Carleon; and so—"

"And so you are good to lose that fifty, Thornbury," interrupted Dyke.



“Possibly. We shall see what a day will bring forth. Yonder comes De Witt at last, with his new chestnut—a five hundred-dollar cut. Showy, but stiff in the hind legs, it strikes me. Eblis here can distance him, and not half try. Clear the track, and I’ll show you when he comes up.”

And as the chestnut trotted abreast of his bay, Thornbury nodded a challenge to its owner, and the two turnouts spun ahead, keeping well together, while the equestrian group brought up the rear.

Meantime, Carleon had reached the city suburbs and turned into a narrow street, bordered by old-fashioned, dilapidated-looking houses. Once this had been a fashionable quarter, and still there was an effort at shabby gentility to be seen in some of the dwellings.

Carleon stopped before a tall, narrow house with weather-stained walls, from which the plastering had dropped away in places, giving it a leprous look. A crooked stairway led up to a porch with a mossy gable roof and pillars matted with ivy. Ivy also muffled several of the small narrow windows that had hood-like roofs and iron-railed balconies.

One of these windows was open, and Carleon saw a slender figure in black pass before it.

“She is here,” he said, and dismounting he gave his horse in charge of a venerable negro and entered the house.

He opened the outer door without ceremony, but inside the hall he stopped before a door on the right hand and tapped gently. At first there was no response; he repeated the knock and a female voice with a slight foreign tone said:

“*Entrez.*”

The shrill tones of a parrot echoed the word. Carleon opened the door and the lady stopped walking and turned round, facing him, leaning one hand on an old-fashioned, claw-footed stand upon which sat the cage of the parrot.

“Welcome if you are a friend!” cried the bird in Spanish.



Carleon laughed, took a raisin from his pocket and gave it to the parrot with one hand, while with the other he lifted the slim, passive hand of its mistress and touched it to his lips.

“I was riding by and called in to see how you were,” he said. “You are looking well. That dress of black soft stuff bound at the waist with only a cord is becoming. A black lace mantilla over your head, a pomegranate flower on your breast, and Montcalm will think he sees before him the sweet little senorita who won his soldier heart in years ago.”

A derisive smile flitted over the dark, delicate-featured face, attractive, though no longer fresh.

“You could always flatter to gain your ends,” she said. “You are strangely anxious I should meet my ex-husband. You have come now to make sure that I keep my appointment with Captain Montcalm this evening. Well, it wants two hours of that time—and I—I have been considering if I shall go.”

“I thought you were decided. There was nothing in his reply to your note to make you unwilling to meet him?”

“Nothing. He wrote that he was greatly surprised to hear from me. No doubt; it is probable that he thought me dead. He could see no good, he said, that could result from our meeting again, after all these years and changes; but he would be at the place appointed—the old cemetery—at six o’clock. I did not look for anything more or anything less. I felt sure he would come—he is afraid to excite my anger, lest I expose him; this is the secret of his compliance.”

“And you are doubtful if you will keep the appointment you made yourself?”

“Made at your instigation, if you please. Why should I want to meet a man who wronged me so cruelly, who ignored me so utterly for all these years—robbed me of my child, evaded my pursuit, and took up his abode in a



foreign land to escape me. I had no thought of meeting him when I came to this place. I came here to see you, to ask you for the sake of old—friendship—to advance me a sum that would enable me to go upon the stage. You had money to throw away, and I knew you were generous. You have that grace, if no other. I did not know, until you told me, that Captain Montcalm was living here with a wife he had married two years ago—he who is rightfully my husband.”

“Not lawfully, however.”

“I care nothing for your law. Honor is above law. He married me honorably as our customs go. In my country of Mexico the ceremony of hand-fastening is binding in right if not in law. The man who breaks it stains his honor. When I married Burrell Montcalm, it was not possible to have the rites strictly legal. The country was in a tumult. He was a wounded refugee from Walker’s routed army of filibusters. My mother and I nursed him back to life. Before his wound was healed he insisted on marrying me. We took the vows kneeling before the shrine of the Virgin in our old church at home in the presence of my mother and friends. It was a left-handed marriage—so they call such in Mexico—but it was honorable and sacred as any. I never doubted his truth: love, gratitude, honor, all seemed to bind him to me. Yet he left me in a year—me a mother, though but little over fifteen—and went back to the States. He said it was to prepare a home for me and reconcile his family to receive me as his wife. But he did not return. He stayed away four years. A few letters came at first—short and unsatisfactory; then these ceased. I had no money to seek him; no friend that could help me. I was miserable; looked on as a poor duped wretch by those about me. Then I fell in with *you*. You persuaded me to leave my child and go with you to the States to hunt for my husband. I went—and—”

A hot flush rose into her olive cheek; her eyes faltered



in their steady gaze into Carleon's; then the long lashes swept up again, and the eyes flashed as she went on:

“After all, I should blame you for my ruined life. If I had not gone with you all would have been different, for Montcalm came as you know; he found me gone; he denounced me and took my child; I have never seen either of them since. But for you—”

Carleon made an impatient gesture.

“You have said it is too late in the day for compliments between us; it is also too late for reproaches. If you persist in bringing up old scores, I must leave you. I make it a rule never to listen to unpleasant things.”

“I know you do. I know how selfish and soulless you are. I knew it then. I spoke falsely just now. I do not lay the great wrong of my life to you. I lay it to the man I gave myself to when I was a loving, innocent child. *You*, I never loved; it was only a temporary infatuation. If I had not been deserted and desperate, with the fever of hurt pride and love burning in my heart, I would never have listened to you. No, the wrong that crippled my life came from the man you urge me to see. Why should I see him? What good will it do? I want money, but not from him. It seems to me that money would burn my fingers if it came from him. There was a time when I longed to be revenged upon him, but hate, like love, has burned out in me. There is nothing in my heart now but ashes; all I hope or ask for now is excitement—something to warm these ashes. The stage will give me this, if I can get there. That is my last hope, and for its sake I have come to you; and you—you discourage me. You think I would not succeed.”

“I do not doubt your success on the stage if you could once get a place upon it. But it is the difficulty, the almost impossibility of this, which leads me to discourage your idea of becoming an actress. It is too late for you to begin at the bottom of the ladder. Besides, you must live;



and you require certain luxuries, indulgences, you tell me, which have become as necessary to you as food and air. How are you to obtain them? I tell you, your best way is to fasten yourself on Montcalm. Oh, I know that course revolts you; but you have seen too much of life not to know that we must be governed by facts, not shadows. Hunger and cold, and the necessity to live and be comfortable, are facts; pride and sentiment are shadows. Thrust them aside. Montcalm owes you reparation for what he has done. He will go to some length, I imagine, rather than you should expose him just now. He is ambitious, aspires to political honors, through his brother's (the general's) influence. He is at the head of the military organization here, and prides himself on his honorable name. It would mortify him and injure him as well to have the story of his early indiscretion—"

"I have told you I would not make that story public—for my own sake. Thanks to you, my part in it would not be blameless. I do not wish to have my past life dissected in the newspapers. If I *should* have an opportunity to go upon the stage, this would be a great injury to me. I wish to appear as young as possible—or at least I do not wish to be handicapped by such a reputation as would be mine after the newspapers had their say. Besides, what have I to gain by making the affair public? I have, you tell me, no legal claims upon Captain Montcalm, and I have no claim upon his heart. A man's love is a poor thing when it is fresh and hot, but after a dozen years have cooled it, bah!"

"You might rekindle it. Montcalm does not look like a person of sentiment, but his brother, the general (who is my good friend), assures me he is a man of very deep feeling and wonderful constancy, and that an early love affair and disappointment in Mexico was the cause of his present reserved and stern demeanor. I believe he has never forgotten you, that he still remembers with fondness the child-wife of his youth. There is another tie—the child."



“It is doubtless dead.”

“I have a very strong idea that it is alive somewhere. A desire to know what has become of it is a good and sufficient excuse for your seeking Montcalm and establishing a claim upon him. You can persuade him that you were never untrue to him (with those eyes and that voice you can make a man believe anything), that you have sought for him everywhere, broken-hearted but still faithful. You are still a magnetic—a beautiful woman.”

She frowned, but in spite of herself the color in her cheek grew warmer.

“So is his wife,” she said presently.

“His wife is a blonde. No tawny Saxon like Montcalm ever loved a blonde. He married her chiefly out of sympathy, partly perhaps for her money. Have you not heard the story? The girl was an orphan with only an adopted brother for a guardian. When she quitted the school-room she went with an aunt to Europe on a short excursion trip. In Florence they met Montcalm, who had been abroad for years in some official capacity. The raw school-girl fell madly in love with the mature, polished man of the world. He knew how to deal with such fancies, and it would probably have come to nothing, only the girl’s aunt died suddenly of apoplexy, leaving her alone in a strange city. She clung to Montcalm for sympathy and protection. They were much thrown together, and the result was that he married her and came back with her to America. But they are uncongenial. She does not interest him. She is romantic and worships him, but it is an ideal. She glories in his stern rectitude and calls him her Roman. But she is fast becoming disenchanted, and when she knows your story, her idol will tumble from its pedestal.”

“She will not know it.”

“She will hear it this evening—in ” (looking at his watch) “less than an hour from now. She will be near your rendezvous with Captain Montcalm—near enough to see and



hear all she can. She has read your note to her husband—or rather a copy of it—asking him to meet you in the old Colonial cemetery. I caused a *fac-simile* of that note to be put into her hands by her maid, with the story that it was picked up in Captain Montcalm's dressing-room."

"You did this?" Zulimee cried, her Spanish eyes ablaze; "and what was your motive? A personal, a selfish one, I know. I do not believe in your disinterestedness. I refuse to be your blind tool. Tell me at once what is your interest in the matter, or—"

"Quietly, *ma belle*. You shall know my motive. I don't mind being open with you. Indeed, your penetration would not permit me to be anything else. In the first place, then, I hate this Montcalm. He has presumed to sit in judgment on my conduct; he gives himself haughty, superior airs; he has crossed my path more than once. He has been put at the head of a military organization here, when I had every right to expect the honor. He is running for, and will probably be elected to, an important city office, when I had a man of my own picked out to fill it. He has forbidden his wife to hold any intercourse with a set here—a little lively, may be, but as respectable as any in the city—a set that includes nearly all my friends. For these and other reasons, I owe a bitter grudge to the man. I would be glad of anything that would mortify or injure him. A separation from his wife would do both. He does not care for her, and she is beginning to resent his indifference. Already they are partially estranged. The knowledge of your claims upon him—the story of his relations with and desertion of you, will complete the estrangement."

"That does not necessarily follow. This relation existed long before he met her. She loves him, she will forgive him and keep his secret for the sake both of her love and her pride. I feel sure there will be no interview between him and me this evening. She has gone to him with re-



proaches; alarmed and humbled, he has explained, protested, promised, and in the end there has been a reconciliation."

"Is that all you know of your sex? Then I understand their nature better than you do, as the sequel will show. I would swear that she has not told him of the note. She has kept her counsel, determined to see for herself. She will be on hand in the old cemetery before you are—concealed somewhere among the tombs or the shrubbery. She will see your meeting with Montcalm—pray manage that it shall seem kind if not passionate; she will overhear something of what is said; take care that she hears what will assure her of your claims upon him, of your wrongs, the child, etc. There will be no opportunity afterward for reproaches on her part, or explanations on his, for he will go straight from the cemetery to the railroad depot. He is pledged to deliver an address at a public gathering in Smithville to-morrow at ten. He would not disappoint the crowd for anything, and his train leaves at half past seven this evening. He will just have time to catch it after his interview with you. To-morrow I have a little lawn party at my island villa. Montcalm has told his wife if she goes she shall not return to his house. He does not imagine she would disobey him, nor did she dream of going so yesterday or this morning. But to-night, when she returns from the cemetery, she will be reckless enough for anything. She will be ready for any vent for wounded pride and outraged love. She will be of the island party, and Montcalm, who is sternly determined and has a terrible temper, will keep his word. She will be in the mood to defy him, and a separation will follow, probably a divorce. Then comes the opportunity for the first wife—the woman he has always loved—to reinstate herself in his affections, in his home and his wealth—she, and probably her child."

"And you, my lord?" she asked with a mocking, but still a beaming smile.



“ Oh, my share of the profit comes in just here. Montcalm will be too much occupied with his tangled affairs to pursue politics or court popularity.”

“ While his lovely wife will be free to ornament the society of which Miles Carleon is the cynosure.”

“ Exactly. You are sure to see to the bottom of my motives. Well, you understand how we can play into each other’s hands, if you will only be reasonable and toss pride and sentiment overboard.”

They did not hear a knock that fell upon the door, but the parrot did. He had been hopping restlessly on his perch and making croaking noises all the while the two conversed: now he shrieked out, “ *Entrez.*” The door opened and a roly-poly, frousy-headed woman entered with a tray, on which were a tiny smoking coffee-pot and a cup and saucer.

“ I have brought your coffee hot and strong, at five as you told me,” she said to Zulimee. “ You were going out, you said.”

“ Thanks, Madame Brazael. Yes; I am going out directly,” the Spanish woman answered, and looked at Carleon.

“ So you will go to the appointment,” he said low, replying to the look. “ That is right; and now forgive one friendly suggestion. You know your weak point—your quick, passionate temper; pray be watchful of it in the coming interview. Be calm and far-seeing. The next hour or two may be laden with fate for you. I trust it will bring only good fortune. Adieu.”

With another touch of his mustached lips to her hand, he was gone. Madame Brazael had also left the room. Zulimee stood a second in thought.

“ Can it be there is any good luck waiting for me?” she muttered. “ I can not feel it so. I am strangely depressed. I shrink from this meeting. Oh, how it will bring back the old innocent, loving days! Ah, well, perhaps the coffee will help me.”



She took up the little metal pot and poured a part of its steaming contents into the cup.

“It looks strong,” she said, eying the clear brown color of the liquid, “but I will add to its strength.”

She opened a drawer and took out a small crystal-and-gilt flask half filled with brandy. She poured a few spoonfuls of the liquor into the coffee and drank it. Then she threw a black lace mantilla over her head, and glanced at her watch; then paced the floor restlessly, holding her hand over her heart.

“It will not do. I must have the morphine after all,” she said aloud. “Nothing else can wind me up. I seem all run down.”

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## CHAPTER II.

CARLEON rode briskly to the quarter of the town where Captain Montcalm lived. Dismounting before a public building, he made his way to an upper story, stationed himself at a window commanding a view of Montcalm's house and brought his opera-glass to bear upon its front door. Five minutes passed; then a female figure, muffled in a gray cloak and veil, came out and passed into the street. Carleon smiled, well pleased. In spite of the unusual dress, he knew Laura Montcalm's gliding yet proud walk. It was she, and she was going to the cemetery, else she would not have dressed that way and would not have gone on foot, when she had a pretty pony phaeton. He watched her enter a street car that would take her near the old river-side cemetery, unused for many years, neglected and overgrown. Then he came down, remounted Mahmoud and was cantering leisurely up the street when Mrs. La Rue's carriage turned a corner. She signaled to the driver to stop and beckoned to Carleon. He rode up beside the carriage, and returned her gay, familiar greeting.



“I went to see Laura this morning, according to promise,” she said.

“And what success?”

“None. It took stratagem to see her, even. The servants had evidently received orders not to admit me. I found her melancholy and subdued. It is plain she will submit to his tyranny; his high mightiness awes her to his will. Besides, she worships him—little fool! I am now convinced it was true—the report that he had ordered her, under penalty of a separation, to break off all intercourse with me and you and the rest of us. Wretched Puritan that he is!”

“Puritan? Don’t judge him by his present strait-laced respectability. If you knew his past! But no matter—or rather all the better for me.”

“What in the world do you mean?”

“Nothing; only that Laura Montcalm will go with us to Aphrodite to-morrow.”

“I can’t see for my life what you found that assertion upon.”

“I don’t always show my hand—even to you. Perhaps I have kept back a telling card to the last, and will trump this trick in spite of his high mightiness.”

“I don’t believe it. I’ll wager my diamond cluster against that emerald on your little finger that you don’t succeed.”

“Done.”

“And now tell me what this trump card is?”

“Oh, that was not in the bargain. It is something that involves a long-standing secret, whose disclosure would be fraught with important results. However, there is something I wish to talk to you about. Can I see you this evening?”

“Certainly—no. I have promised to be at Kalcini’s concert.”

“It will bore you to death. Cut it by ten and take an



ice with me at De Vigne's. There is a matter in which I need your friendly co-operation."

"Very well; but take my counsel, Carleon. Let Mrs. Montcalm alone. That husband of hers will never let her belong to the Sans Souci. If you persist, there will be something serious—a divorce, a duel may be."

"So be it; anything to stir this stagnant old town," laughed Carleon, showing his white teeth under his brown mustache as he bowed and wheeled his horse.

He rode in a canter down to the old cemetery on the outskirts of the town. Riding close to the high brick wall that encircled it—old and crumbling, and held together, it would seem, by the ivy that covered it—he peered over and presently smiled to himself as he caught a glimpse of a gray figure gliding among the shrubbery in the distance.

The next instant it disappeared among the trees that grew thickly near the river-bank. He turned his horse's head and rode back to the town well satisfied.

Laura Montcalm had meantime reached the place of meeting pointed out in the note—the loneliest spot of all the ruined church-yard—known as the Haunted Willow, the burial spot of a noted chemist, who had been convicted of murder fifty years before, and had hanged himself in his cell. The ground here fell in irregular terraces to the river; the trees were hung with wild-grape and bamboo vines, and wild ivy matted the ground. A large rock projected over the water. Near it was a great weeping-willow, overhanging a discolored granite slab, with the name of the murderer-chemist in dim lichen-crust letters upon it.

Laura, standing alone on one of the wooded terraces of the declivity, had peered cautiously through the undergrowth down into this secluded covert. Seeing no one, she descended the natural terrace and stood on the river-bank. She looked for a second into the black, deep waters below, then glanced about her to find a hiding-place. At a little



distance from the Haunted Willow were two large half-sunken limestone rocks, with blossomed rhododendrons growing thickly about them. In the narrow space between these boulders Laura crouched down among the thick wild ivy. The rhododendron boughs screened her well, and in her gray attire she looked a part of the lichened rock she leaned against.

She looked at her watch.

“Five minutes to six,” she said; “I have not long to wait.”

She gathered ivy leaves mechanically, and tore and crushed them with her nervous fingers. She said to herself she would not look out from her covert until some noise gave her the signal. It was not long before the noise came—a rustle, an inarticulate sound between a sigh and an exclamation made her heart leap wildly. She raised her head and looked through the rhododendron boughs. There by the willow stood a veiled woman, enveloped in a loose, dark wrap, gazing about her. As Laura looked, the new-comer threw off the veil and wrap, flinging them upon the old chemist’s tombstone, and stepped out upon the rock that jutted over the water, where Laura had stood a few moments before. A slant, mellow beam of the low sun fell upon her slender, graceful figure in its robe of soft black, bound at the waist with a silken cord, and upon her dark delicate face under the black lace mantilla. The black tendril curls on the low brow, the jetty arched brows, the brilliant eyes, the rich, small mouth and graceful throat—the colored sunset light enhanced their beauty, and Laura’s heart sunk within her.

Zulimee stood looking down at the dark water, but she turned her head every second and seemed to wait impatiently. Laura, with her gaze riveted on the darkly brilliant face, did not hear a firm step descending the terrace; but she saw the black-robed figure turn quickly and waver an instant, then with a low exclamation start forward as



though to throw herself in the arms of the new arrival. But Captain Montcalm stood unmoved, even repellent, his tall soldierly form as haughtily erect, his face as coldly impassive as ever. His Spanish ex-wife stopped just before him, and the two stood looking at each other; she flushing and paling, the red pomegranate bloom on her breast rising and falling with the tide of real emotion that swelled within her. And he—did his eyes soften, his mouth relax—Laura thought so; she was sure of it when she saw Zulimee throw herself on his breast and clasp her arms about him. Still he did not move. The woman's form shook, a smothered sob escaped her—Captain Montcalm looked down at her, and a quiver went over his face; he raised his arms and clasped her in a close embrace. It was a minute before her head was lifted; then his was bowed over her and their lips met.

Presently he led her to a seat on the old grave-stone, and they sat and talked while the shadows lengthened. Only fragments of their conversation reached Laura's ear, but she heard enough to make known to her the former relations between the two. The left-handed marriage in Mexico; the child, who might still be living; and the misunderstanding (explained by Captain Montcalm) which had led to the long separation—they spoke of all this, and from the fragments she caught of their talk, Laura's quick intelligence, sharpened by excitement, made out the whole story. Nothing of all she heard stung her as did the words of Captain Montcalm uttered almost at the close of the interview:

“No, Zulimee,” he said, caressing her slim hand soothingly. “The blame is not fully mine nor yours, it seems. It is fate that has spoiled our lives. I loved you always; I have never loved any other woman. When I came and found you gone, I was too curious to listen to explanations. I did not stop to think that you might reasonably have gone to seek me with the protection and help of a friend. It



was a miserable play of cross purposes all around. If we had met there would have been explanations and all would have been well. We did not meet until now, when it is too late. Two years ago it would not have been too late."

"Is it surely too late now?" Zulimee asked beseechingly. "Have I not a prior claim? You are married where you do not love—and—"

He interrupted her. Laura could not hear what he said—something she caught about his abhorrence of the scandal and gossip that follow upon the separation of those who are married—something about ambition and office and his hope to forget his domestic disappointments in active public business. Then he rose to go; he kissed Zulimee once and again. She said:

"It is not our last meeting. I shall see you again."

When he was gone, she remained standing where he had left her, motionless for a moment. Then she clinched her small hand and exclaimed, in a husky excited whisper:

"I *have* the prior claim—the rightful, if not the legal claim. He *shall* regard it. If he does not do to her as he threatened, I will make him regret it."

Then she, too, left the spot where the shadows of twilight were gathering, and Laura was alone. She sat there among the green ivy that the dews were beginning to moisten, without moving—her face gray and chill as the stone she leaned against. Something slimy and cold gliding across her hand as it lay upon the ground made her start at length. She looked, and saw a little mottled snake eying her curiously. It hissed softly and slid off among the leaves.

"Go!" she said, bitterly. "I would not harm you, and I am not afraid of your harming me; it is the human snake I would like to crush, for it has stung me—yes, to the heart. And shall I suffer it tamely? Shall I not sting in return?"



## CHAPTER III.

ART and nature had made Aphrodite Island a little paradise. A strip of silvery sand beach girdled it like a ring of pearl and made its greenery gleam with emerald brilliancy. The island was dotted with wild myrtle, live-oak and magnolia-trees. An ornamented iron fence, invisible green in color, inclosed the grounds proper. From the great iron gate an avenue led up to the graceful Moorish-looking mansion. In front, in the center of a broad paved circle, a fountain played; half a dozen bright jets pouring from the horns of marble Tritons into a sculptured basin, surrounded by broad-leaved water plants. A hedge of cape jasmine, now in full bloom, snowy and scented, bordered the paved circle. In a magnolia grove at a little distance, the lawn party were seated at a banquet-table, made fairy-like by its surroundings and appointments. Flowers were heaped everywhere. Roses garlanded the fruit-stands; purple grapes and golden-brown figs lay upon beds of lilies, and frosted cakes gleamed in a setting of crimson carnations. The flower-scented air pulsed to the soft strains of a string band, proceeding from an adjacent arbor where the musicians were stationed. An hour ago they had played a gayer measure—and the dancers had whirled to the waltz music, in the paved circle before the mansion.

Presently, at the signal from the host, Miles Carleon, the band returned to their former station—the broad marble steps of the house—and once more the music of Strauss came throbbing through the sunset air, to quicken the pulses of the banqueters.

“Another dance! We will have another dance before we go,” cried a young man, pushing his wine from him.

“Another? We shall have half a dozen, shall we not,



*belle madame*," asked a beardless youth of the fair, though *passée* woman at his side.

"No, indeed," returned Mrs. La Rue, tapping her questioner's arm with the cluster of grapes she was leisurely eating. "One dance more is positively all that can be permitted. We must flit from this charmed spot with the daylight. We dare not linger."

She spoke in lowered tones, with a furtive glance to the head of the table, as though anxious that she should not be overheard by the host, or was it by the lady at his side—the lovely blonde, with the lustrous sea-blue eyes?

But Miles Carleon was not listening to Mrs. La Rue; he was bending over Laura Montcalm.

"You will give me this waltz?" he pleaded.

His tones were like a caress. She drew back, flushing. Then she looked up from the rose she had been absently dipping in her wine-glass, and said coldly:

"I will not dance any more."

He looked at her keenly.

"You are tired," he said. "You have hardly been still to-day. Come and rest awhile in my little cave—the Grotto of Calypso. I have kept that as one of my island lions which you alone shall see."

"I can not permit such a selfish arrangement," she said, still coldly, though his homage was grateful to her bruised self-love.

He looked annoyed. Presently he said:

"You have been in such brilliant spirits all day, what cloud has come over you now?"

Before she could answer a voice at the other end of the table sung:

"The bright hour passes, soon it is o'er:  
Care, the raven, waits at the door."

"Has the shadow of the waiting raven fallen over you?" Carleon said in a whisper full of significance.



A contraction crossed her face; she swept her hand over her brow as though to drive away some painful thought.

“Folly!” she cried, rising from the table. “What raven should wait at *my* door? Yes, Mr. Carleon, you may show me your grotto.”

He drew her hand through his arm, a faint curve of triumph on his handsome mouth.

“As a reward, I will play Ulysses to your Calypso,” he said. “I will relate my adventures—at least the one you begged to hear—the little Venetian episode.”

Mrs. La Rue looked after them from under her dropped lashes. It was hard to interpret the significance of that look.

The party had risen, and were quitting the banquet grove for the open-air dancing-hall—the paved space girdled by the jasmine hedge. The sunset fires were fading when the waltz ended.

“Come,” cried Mrs. La Rue, and she peremptorily led the way down the avenue to the beach. Three painted pleasure-boats rocked there on the tiny wavelets of the bay.

“In with you,” she said, pointing to the boats with her parasol, and looking at the reluctant girls. With pretty pouting, they obeyed their chaperon, if chaperon Bella La Rue deserved to be called, when only her husband’s wealth and her family connections saved her from being ostracized for her imprudences.

Yet she was anxious to keep within the bounds of social toleration, and she trembled lest she had overstepped them by this merry-mad day in the island Eden over which the serpent so notoriously trailed.

She had turned a deaf ear to the entreaties to have one more waltz, or to wait half an hour for such a “splendid moonrise.”

“Stay on the enchanted island till moonrise!” she cried. “Never; we would be transformed into sooty goblins by



those arch professors of the black art, the gossips of Wallport."

"Where is Mrs. Montcalm?" asked a young man, coming down to the shore.

"She sent word we need not wait. She is with Carleon; he will take care of her," returned Mrs. La Rue, without looking around.

"He? Why, Mrs. La Rue, surely you will not permit—and I heard—you must have heard that her husband has threatened—"

"Do I heed all the gossip I hear? Carleon will row Mrs. Montcalm to Wallport before we can get there. As for her husband's threat, one wouldn't fancy it hung very heavily over her from her manner to-day. I never saw her so gay."

"It was forced; one could see that. If I were you, Mrs. La Rue—"

"If I were you, Phil Thornbury, I would go and offer myself to Mrs. Montcalm as her guardian knight. I have no doubt she would recognize the claim of such a sage Quixote."

The young man stood abashed, his chivalrous impulse slain by that weapon so effective when one is young and sensitive—sarcasm from the lips of a fashionable woman. He took his place beside the others, the boats pushed off, and Laura Montcalm was left on Aphrodite Island.

The waning of the daylight could not well be noted in the grotto to which Carleon had taken Mrs. Montcalm. A swinging lamp of silver shaded by a globe of ground-glass diffused a soft, moony radiance through the little retreat—a recess excavated in the side of a cliff and lined with tinted and speckled shells, bright-colored sea-weeds and fronds of white and pink coral. Marine curiosities, some graceful, some grotesque, were scattered here and there, a statuette of Venus Aphrodite occupied a niche in the wall; another was filled by a marble image of Moore's forsaken sea-



nymp in the act of undergoing transformation into a harp.

“ Heaven looked with pity on true love so warm,  
And changed to this soft harp the sea maiden’s form;”

and in the center of the grotto a tiny fountain filled the air with perfumed spray.

Laura half forgot the aching pain at her heart in looking about her. While she was examining the endless variety of shells, Carleon began his promised Venetian story by showing her an exquisite ornament—a watch-case made of seed pearls and delicate shells—a souvenir, he said, of his acquaintance with a beautiful nun of Venice, met first under circumstances of romance and danger.

Probably the story was invented for the occasion, but told as Carleon could tell it, it served his purpose. It held the attention of his auditor and made her forget the flight of time.

She was in the mood to welcome anything that would lift her out of herself, and Carleon’s low, trained voice, and looks that expressed tender, yet respectful homage, soothed and charmed her.

He leaned nearer in his apparently unconscious earnestness, his hand fell upon her bare arm and toyed as though absently with her emerald bracelet. She was beginning to fall under the fascination of his presence and manner—a fascination acknowledged by most men and by all women who knew him, when a near note of music broke the spell.

It came from the strings of a violin played at a little distance from the grotto. A plaintive, tender strain; Laura knew it well. She had played it often on the piano for her father, and David Holt had accompanied her on his violin—David Holt, her father’s confidential clerk, his almost adopted son, whom he had left in his will as Laura’s guardian. Queer, homely, shy David—how good he had been to her; how like a tender woman he had nursed her father in his long sickness, how well she had liked him in



spite of his shy and awkward ways; but how changed, how cold he had seemed when she returned from abroad, no longer his girl-ward, but a married woman, worshiping her handsome, grand-looking husband, and indignant because David did not seem impressed with his god-like attributes.

This train of thought, set in motion by that familiar strain, passed swiftly through her brain. She had started up, saying hurriedly:

“I must go at once; it must be late.”

“One moment,” Carleon pleaded, clearing his brow of the frown that had gathered on it when the music broke the charm he was weaving. But again the soft, beseeching strains of the violin intervened. “Can it be David playing?” thought Laura.

“Not an instant,” she answered promptly. “It must be past sunset.”

She walked to the door of the grotto with decision, Carleon following, mentally execrating the musician, and marveling who had dared to take such a liberty. When they had passed out of the grotto, he looked about for the intrusive player. Laura looked around eagerly, but instead of David she saw a venerable man with a flowing white beard. It was the same man who had played second violin in the band of hired musicians. She remembered him particularly, for she had noticed his watching her from under his slouched hat, in a fixed, queer way.

But she gave little thought to him now. She was alarmed at the lateness of the hour. It was past sunset; the after-glow was almost gone.

“They are waiting for me, I am sure,” she cried, hurrying on along the serpentine walks, and paying little heed to her escort.

She came to the paved circle in front of the mansion; there was no one to be seen: no sound but the plash of the fountain. Dancers and musicians were gone.

“They have gone down to the boats,” she said, and hur-



ried on to the landing. It was silent, deserted; the boats were gone. One of Carleon's servants—the tall, impassive Swiss gardener—was leisurely straightening a rose-bush close by. Laura appealed to him.

“Where are they?” she cried, breathlessly. “Where are the party from Wallport?”

“Gone,” was the laconic reply.

“What, gone and left me! Oh, how could they? It can not be possible. They could not treat me so.”

“There has been a mistake,” said Carleon, coming to her side. “My housekeeper informs me that Mrs. La Rue sent her maid to look for you, to tell you that they were about leaving. The girl brought back word as from yourself, that the party need not wait for you; you would follow them presently.”

“Oh, how utterly false—as you know. I saw no one, I had no message. This is very provoking. Mr. Carleon, I must trouble you to send me home at once.”

“And I am very sorry that I can not do it. There is not another boat on the island. I put them all at the service of the lawn party and the musicians. They will not be returned until to-morrow.”

“Oh, you are certainly jesting! No boat of any kind on the island? Any sort of water-craft will answer—no matter how old and leaky.”

“There is nothing here in the shape of a boat, I grieve to say. The high tide last week carried off two of my skiffs, and Gaunt is coasting in the yacht. It is very unfortunate.”

She wrung her hands together passionately.

“Oh, for pity's sake take me away from here,” she pleaded. “Think of some way, I entreat you.”

“Dear Mrs. Montcalm, it pains me to see you so distressed, but it is impossible to do what you ask. The boats will return early in the morning. My housekeeper will make you comfortable.”



She did not answer. She hardly heard him. She was looking at the tide rolling in and saying to herself that death under its green waves were far preferable to the life that would be hers after she had stayed one night on Aphrodite Island. Carleon came nearer and said, with tender reproach in his tones:

“Is it such a hardship to stay a few more hours in my home when it makes me so happy?”

She turned on him with the sense of having been caught in a snare.

“You and Mrs. La Rue have planned this,” she cried, her eyes flashing scorn upon him.

“I? Ah, dear Mrs. Montcalm, how unjust, how cruel you are! It is the fault alone of the servant who invented a message to save herself trouble. Be reconciled to the unlucky accident. Perhaps”—he went on, speaking yet lower, and leaning over her—“perhaps it is better as it is. Had you gone home to-night, you might have met with insult, violence, from your husband—with none to protect you from his anger. You are safe here—with me—with one who loves you, dearest.”

He laid his hand upon hers as he spoke. She flung it off and darted from his side. Pale, panting, but breathing scorn in every look, she faced him, and her clear tones rang out:

“I would find safety under these black waters first.”

A small boat shot in sight from a cedar-fringed inlet close to her. It contained only one man. A few strokes brought it to the beach, and the man leaped out. Laura uttered a cry of joy.

“David, David!” she exclaimed, springing to meet him.

He took one of the outstretched hands, placed it upon his arm; then he turned with her to the boat, noticing Carleon only by one withering look.

“Curse the luck! His threat was not to be relied upon. He has sent his hireling after her,” muttered Carleon,



under his breath. He returned the look of Holt with a disdainful stare.

“Are you but just come to the island?” he asked.

“No,” was the answer. “I have been here for some hours.”

“Ah! I was not aware my little party had been so honored,” Carleon sneered.

“It is an honor for an honest man to set foot upon Aphrodite Island,” David answered, as he pushed off from the shore.

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## CHAPTER IV.

THE sudden relief that Laura experienced found vent in a nervous paroxysm of tears. Holt did not attempt to soothe her. He waited in silence. Presently she dried her tears, and sat calm but very pale, her hands folded listlessly on her lap. At length she spoke:

“David, you said you had been on the island for hours; why did I not see you?”

“You did see me,” he answered.

“It was you, then, who played in the band; it was you in that disguise, and it was you who was near the grotto,” she added, a deep blush covering her face.

“Yes, it was I.”

“I don’t know what you thought of me,” she said flurriedly, “but if you know—”

She stopped and looked keenly at him.

“He sent you to the island to spy upon me,” she said with a quick scornful change in her voice.

“You are wrong,” David answered gently. “Captain Montcalm knew nothing of my coming. He had not returned when I came away. I did not know you had any idea of being in that island party until you were gone. Had I known, I would have done my best to persuade, to



prevent you from going. As it was I could only follow you that I might be near should you need a friend. I put on the disguise and got in with the musicians because I wanted to look on without being recognized, and because I knew that, uninvited and only known to Carleon as a person in the employment of a man he dislikes, I would stand a poor chance of being admitted to the grounds.”

“And you went to watch over me? That was kind—that was like the David of the dear old days; and I thank you.”

The sad cadence of her voice went to David's heart. She looked so stricken he longed to comfort her as he had been wont to do when she came to him with her childish sorrows; but he forbore. He had always exercised stern control over himself; and she had never suspected his secret—never guessed that her father's protégé—the boy he had taken from a miserable, motherless home, and brought up in his own house, had cared for her other than as a brother.

“I deserve no thanks, Laura; I promised your father I would try to watch over you as a sister. I wish I could have better fulfilled that trust—but circumstances have lately made it difficult—I—”

“You think I am not worth watching over lately,” she interrupted with a bitter little laugh. “You seem to have given me up. You work for Captain Montcalm in that dusty office from morning till night. You are devoted to his interests; and you never knew *him* of old; but I who have sat by you at the same hearth for so many years, I whom you have nursed in your arms when I was a fretful, feeble, motherless child—I whom you used to care for so kindly, am now thrown out of your heart. You never come near me except for that formal Sunday dinner, when there are always others. Captain Montcalm and his business are ever in your mind, but I have no place there—or anywhere, I think.”

David looked at her helplessly. He could not tell her



why he now so seldom came into her presence—why he could not resume the old brotherly, fatherly relation he had once sustained to her. He could not tell her that it was for her sake he sat poring over account books in that dingy office of Captain Montcalm's warehouse—that it was only to be near her and watch over her welfare that he had given up the profession of law in which he had embarked with promise, turned his back on his native town and state, and followed the wedded pair to Wallport, there to seek and fill the place of a book-keeper in Captain Montcalm's newly purchased warehouses. From the first day that the bride and groom arrived from Europe, he had foreseen that the marriage would not be a happy one. He had loved Laura always in his still, quiet way—he had nursed in his heart the hope to win her when he should have achieved something of a reputation among men; he had looked upon her as scarcely more than a child, and he was surprised, almost appalled, to see the strength of passion with which she loved this cold, moody man, who hardly made a pretense of responding to her affection. A vague story concerning Captain Montcalm's marriage in Mexico had at one time found its way into some of the daily newspapers, and this now came to David's mind. He tried to investigate it, but the dust of years had settled upon the story and its traces were covered up. He could only hope it was mythical, but his anxiety for Laura caused him to sacrifice his business prospects in his native town and follow her to her new home. He would watch over her at a distance, he said to himself; he would fulfill her father's trust as best he might. If the time came when she needed a true friend he would be near at hand.

But he could give her no hint of this; so he only said, in reply to her accusation:

“Our lives lie so widely apart. Mine is filled with work; yours with leisure and friends—and gayety.”

“Friends—gayety,” she echoed mockingly. “I have no



friends. God help me—not one. Gayety! Is it possible you have not seen, what all the world about us knows, that I am that pitiable thing—an unloved wife? Have you cared so little about me that you could not read in my face—in my restless, forced gayety—the tokens of a disappointed heart? You have thought me frivolous, no doubt. With your ideas of wifely dignity, you have condemned me as giddy, imprudent, careless of my husband's wishes. But what can *you* know of the goading misery that drives a neglected wife into seeking distraction abroad? When I accepted the attention of Carleon it was with the hope of stinging my husband's heart into life through jealousy; I only roused his anger—his self-love. He coolly ordered me to give up the only associates I had. He declared I was bringing dishonor upon *his* head. Dishonor upon *him*! I think the fiends in the bottomless pit must laugh to hear a man who is steeped to the lips in falsehood and treachery accuse his wife of dishonoring him by some little act of imprudence to which she has been driven by the fever of a starved and lonely heart. Well, I would have obeyed him, for I still believed in him; I still looked up to him as one who stood on a moral height—grand, if cold. He stands there no longer. I know him now; I know his falsehood to me, his baseness to another of my sex. Yesterday evening I knew all; and now—now I have disobeyed him and I will defy him. He has threatened to cast me off; it is I who will expose him to the world he is so anxious to stand well with. The world shall know to-morrow that he deserted one wife and has married another whom he openly owns he never cared for.”

“Laura!” exclaimed David aghast, “have you found out that—I mean, what is it you suspect?”

She caught at the meaning of his half-finished sentence. “Yes, I have found out,” she said. “David, I see you knew it before. You knew about that woman and her child, and you would not tell me!”



“It was too late to tell you. You were his wife; and I had only heard a rumor.”

“Too late for my happiness, not too late for my pride. He shall see that.”

“How came you to know? Who could be so cruel as to tell you?”

“I found it out through a note written by the Spanish woman to my—*her* husband, asking him to meet her.”

“The note may have been a forgery.”

“Stop. I went to the place of appointment; I concealed myself, and I saw and heard—I heard him say he had never cared for me; that is enough.”

Her clasped hands dropped upon her lap; her desolate gaze went over the darkening water. David burned with indignation against the man who wronged her. But only in this man's love would she ever be happy. He believed this; so he said, gently:

“Remember, dear Laura, this woman is not his wife. She has no claim—”

“No claim! She has his love. She is the mother of his child. What are a few words mumbled by a priest to such a claim? I will proclaim her right. I will publish my wrong and his villainy. It is to tell him that I will do this that I am returning to his house to-night. He is proud of his high standing in society. At least it will sting his pride to have his baseness made public. He may do his worst. I am steeled to meet it.”

“Laura, promise me that you will not speak those violent words to-night. Do not have that interview with your husband until you and he are calmer. You know his fierce temper; he might—”

“Kill me, you would say? Well, let him. He has already killed the best part of my being. No; I will say all that is in my heart to-night. It is burning in me for utterance. I can not keep it back a day, an hour longer. To-morrow I will quit his house forever.”



“Where will you go?”

“I do not know. I have not a creature akin to me—no being of my own flesh or blood to protect or befriend me. But the world is wide; I shall find a home somewhere.”

“Laura, I have something to tell you that may comfort you in this crisis. Rather, I have something to give you which will tell the story of comfort more fully and tenderly than I can. It is here in my hand—a letter written by your father. He intrusted it to me an hour before his death. I was to give it to you only in case of a certain emergency. I consider that this emergency has arrived. I knew of your husband’s threats; I followed you to the island partly to give you this letter. It contains a secret—a secret your father kept from you during his life. He thought it was not necessary you should know it. It is necessary now. Take the letter, read it and act upon it if you think best.”

“A secret my father kept from me? How strange that seems! Had you told me this yesterday morning, it would have agitated me beyond words. Now, I seem dead to all natural feeling. A reckless spirit possesses me. It seems urging me to do something desperate. I am half mad, I think.”

He looked at her anxiously. In the light of the newly risen moon, her eyes gleamed with wild luster.

“She ought never to have that interview with her husband to-night,” he thought, but he knew her strong-willed nature; he had little hope of preventing her.

The boat had been steadily pushed across the placid, almost waveless bay. It was now approaching shore. Further down at the water’s edge, loomed the dark warehouse in which David worked; and beyond gleamed the lights of the city. The boat touched the wharf; David helped Laura to shore, found a carriage, and entering with her they were driven to the door of her husband’s house.

It stood under the tree-shadows, silent and dark, but for



a ray of lamp-light which streamed through the half-closed window-shutter of a room on the lower floor.

“He is here,” Laura said under her breath. “He is in his study.”

David felt her fingers tremble, as she put the latch-key into his hand.

“I will not ring,” she said. “There is no one to answer it. The cook, with her son, the house-boy, has gone to see her sick mother, and my maid got leave to go to a party this evening.”

“And there is no one besides Captain Montcalm in the house? Laura, you must permit me to go in with you—to be present at this meeting with your husband.”

But she refused with a gesture of almost angry decision. “I am not afraid of him. He would not dare lift his hand to me. If he did,” she said, drawing something from her belt, and holding it up, “if he did dare,” she repeated with a short, hard laugh, “he will find that I know how to use this.”

The moonlight gleamed on a keen, tiny blade of blue steel, and on its jeweled hilt. He had never before seen it drawn out of its golden sheath, though he had often seen the strange-looking ornament in Laura’s girdle, and he knew that it was an heir-loom in her family.

Its gleam at this moment, and the kindred gleam in Laura’s eyes, filled him with dread.

“Dearest Laura,” he began; but she snatched the key from his hand and unfastened the door herself. As she was going in, she turned and laid her hand on his arm.

“Dear David, forgive me,” she said, “you have done me a great kindness to-night. I thank you with all my heart. Good-bye.”

“You will read the letter—your father’s letter to-night—immediately?”

“To-night,” she said, and closed the door between them.



## CHAPTER V.

Two hours later, Mrs. Montcalm's maid, Frances, returned from the party, escorted by her sweetheart. She was bidding him good-night on the back porch, when the door suddenly opened and a woman came out. She was wrapped in a dark mantle; her features were muffled in a veil. But as she hurried past the girl, her veil caught on Fanny's shoulder, and the astonished maid saw the face of her mistress. So white the face looked in that swift, moon-lit glimpse, that the girl came near screaming. The apparition was gone before she recovered herself.

"It was my mistress!" she said, in a terrified whisper to her companion.

"It was Mrs. Montcalm," he answered; "but how pale she looked!"

"Something is wrong; something has happened. I am frightened half to death. Don't go away, Harry. Wait here on the porch awhile."

She opened the door. The hall was dark and silent. She groped her way to the table, where she had left lamp and matches. Her foot slipped in something; she stooped to investigate, and dipped her fingers in a warmish fluid that seemed to have run along the floor. With her heart in her mouth, she seized a match-box and struck a light. As it flashed up, her shriek ran through the silent house. The light had shown her her fingers dabbled with blood.

Her screams startled the inmates of the neighboring houses. Soon the hall was filled with men, and hurried questions were put to the excited girl.

She could only point to the stream of blood on the floor. It had run from under the library door. The door was open; it was not locked, but force was required to push it



open, for a dead weight lay against it. The body of Captain Montcalm was stretched upon the floor in a little pool of blood. His upturned face bore the stamp of violent passion. On his breast glittered something like a star. It was the hilt of a tiny poinard. As one drew out the keen, slender blade, reeking with blood, exclamations burst from the group gathered around the body. More than one recognized the glittering hilt by its sinister design, a cobra, the raised hood studded with a single ruby, the eyes two diamond sparks. They had seen it worn by Mrs. Montcalm, though they thought it then only a curious and costly ornament. Now, as they saw the dripping blade, the eyes of each said: "She did the deed. He denounced her for her conduct, and she stabbed him with this seeming toy she wore."

The thought burst into vehement utterance when Mrs. Montcalm could nowhere be found, and when the maid told her story, corroborated by her lover, of meeting her mistress flying from the house. Hers was almost the only evidence in the case, beyond the testimony that Mrs. Montcalm had that day gone to Aphrodite Island in defiance of her husband's wishes, that she had worn the jewel-hilted poniard (in its gold sheath) stuck in her silken girdle, and that she had returned from the island in company with her husband's clerk.

David Holt was found in bed in his room at the warehouse, but he was in no condition to give evidence. His senses were locked up in a stupor, which proved to be the prelude of a brain fever. It kept him at death's door for many weeks, and when at last it released its hold, it left him a wreck in mind. Friends from his native place came for him and took him back with them.

Not a doubt of Laura Montcalm's guilt was entertained, even by those who had been her friends. The State offered a reward of five hundred dollars for the detection and apprehension of Bayard Montcalm's murderer, and five thou-



sand dollars was added to this by General Montcalm, the elder brother of the murdered man. General Montcalm was one of the oldest and most honored citizens of Wallport. He had loved his brother devotedly.

Bayard was much younger than he, and as a youth had been wayward, but brilliant and lovable. The general had regarded him with a mixture of fraternal affection and fatherly care and solicitude. His death in this terrible manner was a shock which at first paralyzed the general, then strung every fiber of his being to the vengeful desire to find and punish the slayer. He felt firmly assured that this was Laura Montcalm, and that she had fled to Miles Carleon for concealment. Carleon scornfully threw open his house and grounds at Aphrodite Island to the inspection of the police. A thorough search was made, but without result.

Still there were many who believed that the fair fugitive was concealed in some secret portion of the oddly built mansion, or in some nook of the intricately planned grounds. Others believed that she had drowned herself after committing the desperate act.

A veil, with the initials of her name embroidered in the corner, and tracks, which corresponded with the size of her slender feet, were found at the water's edge.

But in discredit of this theory it was asserted that a small malachite box, in which she kept money and valuable jewels, was missing.

The police force of the city bent its energies to finding the missing woman. Telegraph wires had at once flashed a description of her along every line. Every vessel and every railway train that left Wallport underwent detective scrutiny.

But all in vain. No clew was obtained to the woman whose name had become a by-word of shame and crime.



## CHAPTER VI.

“ Not for your silver bright,  
But for your winsome daughter.”

MONTHS went by. More than a year had elapsed since the tragedy at Wallport. Still the murder remained a mystery. The police had been baffled: Laura Montcalm had not been seen or heard of.

One day, General Montcalm dispatched a note to the office of the “ Daily Rattler,” requesting that young Hall—a brilliant *attaché* of that paper—should come and see him in his study.

Hazard Hall was one of the general’s coterie of youthful pets. The old ex-soldier and politician was no fossil. He loved dearly to gather young men of talent about him—keen, enthusiastic fellows, who had their way in the world to carve by their own wits. Their bold theories, their sanguine views, revived him. He was wont to say that in their enthusiasm lay the seed of progress. It was better than the cautious judgment of age.

Shortly after he had come to Wallport with the hope to better his fortunes, young Hall had rendered a service to General Montcalm (saved him from being injured in a street-car accident), and thus had made his acquaintance and been invited to his house. The general listened with interest to Hazard’s comically told but pathetic account of his battle with poverty, drew out the young fellow’s ideas upon political and social questions, laughed at some of his extreme notions, and finally took him by the hand and introduced him to the proprietors of the “ Rattler ”—a new, live paper which was doing its best to supplant the two dull dignified dailies of the city.



“Full of brains and vim—worth a dozen of any man you have on your staff,” was the general’s recommendation of his favorite to the managing editor of the “Rattler.” And the latter found the eulogy was pretty well deserved.

The new *attaché* at once brought himself into notice by the skill and ingenuity with which he traced out some well-covered-up frauds in the late municipal administration, and the daring with which he exposed them.

The general sat in his study—a pleasant room in his large, old-fashioned town residence—when Hazard Hall was announced. He held out his hand to the young journalist, and smiled paternally into his dark, eager face; then drew up a seat for him in front of his own easy-chair, and with characteristic promptness entered upon the subject that occupied his mind.

“My boy,” he said, “the clever way you ferreted out those frauds in our city government proves that you are keen on the scent—that you have the born instinct of the detective.”

“And you have sent for me to declare that it is my destiny to be the American Lecoq?” interposed Hazard, smiling into the general’s face in his half-impudent, half-confiding way.

“I have sent for you to ask that you will—if so please you—undertake a little in that line for me.”

“For you, general?”

“Yes. You were not here at the time; but you heard, you know, that my brother—my dear and only brother—was found dead in his room, murdered.”

“Yes, general.”

“And you know that the murderer has escaped; that he—no, let us speak out plainly, *she*—has never been traced. The police here are a stupid lot. They have no imagination. A man can not be a good detective without it. Imagination suggests probabilities which research may verify. Now, I want you to look into the matter; to examine the



inquest evidence and see if some idea is not suggested which may lead to getting upon the track of the criminal."

Hazard did not answer for a minute. He had his hands full already. The "Rattler" had determined to bring forward an independent candidate for governor against the regular nominees, one of whom was Ira Heathcliff, present mayor of Wallport. The fight would be a hard one. His pen would be called upon to do vigorous work.

Seeing his hesitation, the general said:

"You know what reward has been offered. I will add to it if you think it not enough, and any favor beside I can do you—"

"Oh, the reward is ample. If I undertake it, it will be for your sake, general, not for the reward."

But still he hesitated.

"Why do the roses bloom?"

sung a rich, sweet voice outside. It was the voice of Honor Montcalm, the general's only child—the image of her dear mother, whose beauty had shone supreme at a foreign court.

Honor was walking in the garden. Hazard could see her from the window; a tall, stately girl, dressed in white with a cluster of red carnations on her breast. The low sun glinted on her dark gold hair, her white neck and brow. She looked a creature made to walk among lilies and roses.

"Well?" said the general, breaking the pause.

"Well, sir, I will undertake it," Hazard answered, and he added to himself:

"But 'tis not for your silver bright,  
But for your winsome daughter."

After a few suggestions from General Montcalm, Hazard rather hurriedly took his leave. That white vision in the garden had put murder and detection out of his mind. He went out of the room thinking to join her. But on



reaching the piazza he found himself forestalled. Some one else had joined Miss Montcalm in the garden—some one who walked confidently at her side, her hand resting on his arm. Hazard knew that tall, upright, square-shouldered figure. A look of strong dislike came into his face.

“A cold-blooded, purse-proud upstart! does *he* think to win her?” he said, between his set teeth.

He had seen that Mayor Heathcliff—the rich mill-owner—before so indifferent to women—had suddenly entered the list of Honor Montcalm’s lovers, and he had heard that she favored his suit. But this he did not, would not believe. He shut his eyes to everything that might crush his hopes. With the impetuous ardor and sanguine self-belief of his nature, he had determined that the possession of Honor Montcalm should be the goal of his ambition. She liked him; she showed this frankly enough. His brilliant talk amused and aroused her. She admired the ingenious daring of his intellect, his dark and handsome face. She permitted him sometimes to be her escort. Surely this was encouraging.

Yet there was a difference in her manner to him and to Mr. Heathcliff. Hazard noted this now—in the way she leaned on Heathcliff’s arm and looked up into his face. She, who for all her sweetness, was so proud, was little wont to lean upon or to look up to any one. Hazard’s face grew dark.

“Yet I will not give her up without a struggle,” he muttered, as he closed the gate and turned into the street. He had not been seen by the two who walked in the garden in the fragrant twilight.



## CHAPTER VII.

HAZARD walked rapidly back to the office of the "Rattler," and mounted the two flights of stairs that led up to his "den"—the eight by ten sanctuary in which he did his share of the daily scribbling and scissoring for the paper. A glance around this small sanctum would have told an interested observer that there were mixed elements in the character of the occupant. The walls were covered with engravings; here a pure-browed Evangeline, there a bold-eyed *danseuse* in fleshings; here a St. John with seraph face, and opposite, a burly prize-fighter, stripped to the waist. A tiny glass on the desk held a white tea-rose, and in a pigeon-hole just above it was a bottle of beer and a half-smoked cigar.

The afternoon's mail had been brought in and the desk was piled with unopened newspaper exchanges. Atop of these were two letters. Hazard had few friends and no kinspeople, so his personal correspondence was limited. He took up the letter on top carelessly, opened it and glanced over the half dozen unimportant lines it contained. His eye lighted on the superscription of the other letter, and with a quick change of countenance, he took it up and broke the seal. Out dropped a bank-note of a hundred dollars. This, inclosed in a sheet of paper on which was written, "Please accept," was all the envelope contained. He was not surprised. He suspected what the contents would be when he saw the handwriting on the address. Twice before, since he had been in Wallport, had he received similar anonymous gifts through the mail. The envelopes were postmarked Wallport—dropped letters therefore; but who could have sent them. Not his friend, the general; he would do nothing so mysterious, even if he was



inclined to play the benefactor in this way, which he was not. Hazard could not conjecture who the mysterious donor could be. He scrutinized the chirography on the envelope. The letters were cramped, and written backward—evidently a disguised writing. He looked at the bill with mingled feelings of pleasure and dissatisfaction. The money was not out of season. His pay was small, and his tastes, in some things, inclined to the luxurious; but he was proud and sensitive; he could not bear that any one should suppose him to be in want of money. Nevertheless, he had spent the sums that had come to him previously. He had put them aside at first and hesitated about making use of them for some time, till urged by necessity his scruples had been set aside. But now he felt increased repugnance to using money that had come into his possession in this irregular way. Love and ambition had stimulated his pride. Moreover, the strangeness of this gift forced itself more and more upon his attention. He connected it with the mystery of his parentage. The sender of this money must know who were his parents, and why he had never been told of them; why he had been sent to the Catholic school of St. Mary's among the Maryland mountains when he was a little child, and there had been reared and educated without once seeing any being who claimed kinship with him or guardianship over him. His expenses had been paid up to his sixteenth birthday by money transmitted through the mails, to the president of the college—money accompanied by no name or address. When he was sixteen these remittances ceased—the boy fancied himself slighted because he was a dependent, and ran away from school. He made his way to Cincinnati, and did odd jobs for a living, meanwhile picking up a knowledge of type-setting. Accident showed his employer the boy's fine faculty for writing, and he became a reporter on a daily paper. The pay was poor, but the training and discipline were invaluable. He was a rapid and forcible writer at twenty-



two, when he drifted to Wallport, and through General Montcalm's influence, was taken upon the staff of the "Rattler."

He had a strong belief in himself and his future. Partly this came from natural self-confidence and partly it was caused by the prediction of the noted spirit-medium, Mme. Sylvestre. Like all imaginative persons he had a vein of superstition in his nature, and when this gaunt, gray-eyed sorceress gave him a history of his past life, true in every detail, so far as he knew it himself—which she could well do, being a mind-reader—and then informed him that he would succeed beyond his hopes, and become rich and influential, her words took hold upon his imagination and colored his hopes. She told him also that his parents were dead, and that he had been left to the charge of a dishonest guardian who had swindled him out of his patrimony. This conjecture had been floating about in his own brain for a long time, and her subtle mind-reading instinct had probably perceived it.

"I will ferret out the mystery of these anonymous gifts!" Hazard said to himself. "If I can get a clew to the donor, I suspect it will lead me straight to that rascally guardian, who has cheated me and kept out of my sight or knowledge, enjoying my fortune while I am earning my bread by the hardest sort of drudgery."

As he spoke, Hazard attacked the big pile of newspapers, tearing off their wrappers and scanning the columns with his rapid, practiced eye, clipping a paragraph here and there and putting it between the leaves of his note-book for reference or comment.

The last paper had undergone this rapid examination, and Hazard had dashed off a page or two of those short, pungent satirical paragraphs in the writing of which he excelled, when on putting his hand into his pocket to get a fresh pencil, he felt and drew out a note which General Montcalm had given him, with the remark that the in-



formation it contained about a city matter would make a good item. The note was from Mayor Heathcliff—the late Democratic nominee for Governor—Honor Montcalm's suitor. Hazard read it and sat musing half absently. Suddenly he scrutinized the writing more closely. Something in the turn of a capital letter had struck him with the idea that there was a resemblance between this writing and that of his unknown patron. He caught up the envelope that had contained the money and put it beside Heathcliff's note. Was it only his fancy, or was there a resemblance in the shape of certain letters? He at once remembered that a noted expert was then in the city on a business mission; he would take the envelope and note to him, together with a number of specimens of other handwritings, and see what he could make out of it. He put the two pieces of paper in his pocket, and going into the room of the business manager, asked for and obtained a goodly number of letters that had been "worked over" and thrown into the wastebasket. A few minutes later, he was ushered into the room of the expert, a taciturn man with a face like a tombstone.

Hazard put the pile of letters on the table before him, among them the note from Mayor Heathcliff, and giving him the envelope that had contained the money, said:

"Can you tell me if any of these letters were written by the same hand that wrote this address?"

"In half an hour I can tell you," replied the solemn-looking man.

"Very well, I will wait."

To economize time Hazard took out his note-book and began to write, while the expert examined the letters, bringing each one within a few inches of his nose, and peeping at it intently through his short-sighted glasses.

Before that half hour was quite out, the oracle had spoken.

"The handwriting of this letter and that upon the en-



velope is the same. The latter is disguised, but it was written by the same hand as the other.”

Hazard started up and went to the table. The letter the expert had indicated was the note to General Montcalm, bearing Ira Heathcliff's firm signature.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

MAYOR HEATHCLIFF sits in his study—a pleasant room in his elegant home on Evergreen Street. A striking presence is that of Ira Heathcliff, Mayor of Wallport. Tall, massively built, with a firmly poised head, a resolute mouth and steadfast gray eyes—such a face as might well belong to a man who had worked his way up to fortune and position. The lines on his brow show that this rise has not been achieved without a battle; and a peculiar expression in his gray eye—a large thoughtfulness, shading into melancholy—seems to hint that he has also had to do battle against himself.

But it is hard to read eyes so full of deep meaning as Ira Heathcliff's. Just now they are crossed by changing lights. He is opening and glancing over the papers and letters the mail-carrier has deposited on his table. As he reads the various comments—caustic or congratulatory—upon his prospects of political elevation, his face changes. With all his stern strength of nature, he is not proof against a thrill of pride as he reads the praises of his integrity and fitness for an office of trust. But the bitter flings of his enemies kindle in him only amusement or mild scorn. He has learned to expect rebuffs and to disregard them. Only one of the newspaper thrusts really wounds him—a few paragraphs of keen, biting satire in the columns of the “Rattler,” the new daily, which has a rattlesnake as its figurehead, with the motto: “*Nemo me impune lacessit.*”



The thrust is in the French style, delicate and deadly. He recognizes the hand that dealt it.

“*Et tu, Brute?*” he says, with a smile half sad, half cynical.

The next instant he forgets all about the “Rattler,” for his eye has lighted upon the superscription of a letter which changes the current of his thoughts. He breaks the seal and reads with a frown the few lines, in a lady’s hand, written upon the square white card which falls from the envelope. He tosses the card upon the table, exclaiming:

“It is impossible for a woman to be reasonable. How can I humor her when—”

A knock of the door interrupts him. A visitor is announced. He bites his lip when the name is given, but finally says, “Show him in,” and Hazard Hall walks in. The mayor does not seem to notice his haughty nod, but courteously invites him to be seated. But the young man walks straight to the table and throws an envelope down before Ira Heathcliff.

“My business with you is brief,” he says. “I want first to ask, did you write the address upon that envelope?”

The abrupt question, the keen, sudden look, threw Heathcliff off his guard. His face flushed; he half-stammered:

“Why do you ask me this?”

“I see you did write it,” Hazard returned. “You sent the money that is inclosed in it; you sent a similar sum twice before in the same way. Now, tell me what is the meaning of these anonymous gifts? What business have you to send me money? What right have I to it?”

Heathcliff did not speak for an instant; then he said:

“Regard it as a mere friendly present, sent through me by one who takes an interest in your welfare.”

“Who is this person, and why does he take an interest in me?”

“That I can not tell you.”



“You *will not* tell me, you mean!” the young man cried, angrily.

“Have it so then: I will not tell you.”

“Nor will you tell me who my parents are, though you know. Do you not know? Stay: do not speak yet. I will entreat you to tell me who they are—will you do it?”

Once more Heathcliff hesitated, looking even kindly into the young face before him, where anxiety had softened the expression of haughty distrust with which Hazard had regarded the mayor.

“No, I can not tell you. Why should you imagine that I know?” he said at last.

“You *shall* tell it. I will force you to,” Hazard burst forth, thrusting his clinched hand almost in Heathcliff’s face.

The mayor’s cool, contemptuous eye brought back the boy’s self-control.

“The money you last sent is there,” Hazard said more calmly, pointing to the envelope. “The other sum I will return to you as soon as I can. I will not accept the money unless I can know what right I have to it. Doubtless you have most honorable motives for keeping this from me.”

“What dishonorable motive could I have?”

“Such as this. I am perhaps heir to a large amount of money, which has been confided to your charge. You have used it to enrich yourself. As a salve to your conscience, you send me a beggarly stipend in this underhand way.”

Anger lightened from Heathcliff’s eyes. He rose from his seat and confronted the young man.

“By Heaven!” he cried. “If it were not for one consideration, I would divulge the whole secret and humiliate you to the dust. It would be a fit punishment for your insolence in daring to say such things to me.”

“Yes, I dare say such things to a man who withholds from me what I have a right to know, even if that man be



so great a personage as the owner of Heathcliff Mills, Mayor of Wallport, and prospective governor of the state. But that last title remains to be won; and you will not win it without a fight, for all your money. Money can't muzzle the press, though it may put its chain and collar on a few cravens of the pack. We will scent out the secret flaws in that moral record you count so largely upon. We will lay bare your motives and schemes. Benefit by the warning if you can. Adieu, Mayor Heathcliff. If not before, we shall meet at your Philippi—the polls.”

Heathcliff sat motionless for a minute after his impetuous visitor had vanished through the door-way. His anger was gone; his face wore a look of grave perplexity.

“What can be the secret of that boy's rancor against me?” he mused. “It can not be solely because I have withheld from him the source of a benefaction. There must be some other reason.”

Not once did it enter his mind that this fiery young stripling was a lover of Honor Montcalm, and that jealousy was the secret of his bitter animosity to Miss Montcalm's favored suitor.

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## CHAPTER IX.

HAZARD quitted Heathcliff's house in a state of high excitement. That this man knew the secret of his parentage, he fully believed; that his parents had left him money, of which Heathcliff had defrauded him, he began to suspect; but he had no proof; he had no way of forcing the mayor's acknowledgment. His fiery impetuosity would have no effect upon the other's iron firmness. And how contemptuously the massive form of the mill owner had towered above him; how scathingly his gray eye had run over the slender figure! The boy chafed under the recollection.

“And he is Honor Montcalm's favored suitor,” was the thought that gave added bitterness to his mood.



But he had no time to engage in speculations, or to form visionary plans. He must work; this was a present necessity. As he turned to enter the office of the "Rattler," he could see in the distance the volumes of black smoke pouring out of the tall chimneys of Heathcliff's factory and staining the blue sky.

"Curse him!" he thought. "*He* has no need to work. He will order his phaeton and take his lady love to drive this bright afternoon."

Dyke, the leading editor, looked up from his desk as Hazard was passing on.

"It seems to me you are not attending to your business to-day," he said. "I sent you the old files of the 'Republic' that you might hunt up that report of Heathcliff's speech when he ran for Congress five years ago and pick out the damaging paragraphs to comment on and show up in a strong light; and here you are out of your place—running around."

Hazard vouchsafed no reply, but ran upstairs to his den, where he threw himself in a seat before his desk. He pulled to him the file of yellow newspapers, but before he began to examine them his eyes fell upon the roll of legal cap over which he had been poring the night before. They were papers relating to the inquest held over the body of Captain Montcalm—the statement of the surgeon who examined the body, and the evidence of the two servants who discovered it and of the persons who lived nearest the house in which the murder was committed; also the testimony of other persons who had intimated a knowledge of some circumstance that might throw light upon the crime.

The evidence had seemed of little value to Hazard when he looked it over last night; now, as he drew the papers to him, half mechanically, a flush mounted to his brow. The name of Ira Heathcliff had caught his eye. He read with new interest the statement of one John Bowen, a carpenter, who attested that, while passing Heathcliff's house, ne-



tween nine and ten o'clock on the night of the murder, he had seen Laura Montcalm go into the mayor's yard by a side gate and enter the house. He seemed to have been positive of this at first, but on being further questioned, to have admitted the possibility of having been mistaken. He had caught only a glimpse, he said, of the woman, and he barely knew Mrs. Montcalm by sight. On its being shown that Mr. Heathcliff's housekeeper—wearing a dark dress, such as Mrs. Montcalm wore that night, according to the maid's testimony—had returned from a wedding-party (the same which Fanny attended) at half past ten, it was decided that this was the woman in black whom John Bowen had seen entering Heathcliff's premises. True, the carpenter had at first affirmed it was but half past nine when he saw the supposed Mrs. Montcalm, but afterward he declared that he wouldn't give a guess at the time. It might have been earlier than ten or it might have been later. He "wasn't payin' no attention to the triflin' circumstance, anyhow."

Bowen had been dismissed and his testimony set aside as worthless. Nevertheless, Hazard referred to it with an interest that deepened into eagerness as he suddenly connected it with something he had read while he was in the mayor's room. This was nothing less than the note written on the enveloped card which had seemed to annoy Heathcliff so greatly. He had tossed it from him, and it fell face upward upon the table. There it lay when Hazard stood beside the table. During the half minute when he waited in suspense for the mayor to answer his question about his parents, Hazard's glance had casually dropped upon the card lying just beneath his eye. Involuntarily, without being conscious at first what he was doing, he read the three or four lines written on the dainty, silver-edged square of pasteboard. Even in that anxious moment, they struck him as being very strange, particularly as written to the grave and stately mayor, who had never been known to



pay attention to any woman but Honor Montcalm. There was no address, no signature, only these lines:

“I find I can not give up that imprudent whim, as you call it. I have set my heart upon it; so humor me this once, my best and dearest, and come for me to-night. Remember how long I have been starved for music.”

Who had written these words of familiar endearment to Ira Heathcliff—“the model of propriety”? Hazard said bitterly—who had never been known to be more than courteous to any woman until he bowed at the shrine of General Montcalm’s daughter.

What woman could it be who had written these lines, and why should her going to the opera be called “imprudent”? It was not Honor Montcalm. The handwriting was not hers. Nor was it like her to express herself in this way.

Hazard determined to be at the opera-house to-night, and see the woman who had written this unsigned note to the lover of Honor Montcalm.

He resolved, too, to hunt up John Bowen, and question him more closely concerning the woman he had seen entering Heathcliff’s gate the night of the murder. With his usual energy, increased by excitement and by the thought that he was working against Heathcliff, he turned his attention to the newspaper files, found the mayor’s old speech, picked out the damaging paragraphs, and succeeded, by detaching these from their context and throwing the light of strong comment upon them, to give them a darker and more “damaging” significance. He carried the article to the senior editor, who read it, with a little twinkle of approval in the corners of his eyes, but only said, “That’ll do,” and sent it into the composing-room. As Hazard was going out he called to him.

“Hall,” he said, “we have just sent a note to General Montcalm, asking permission to announce him as an in-



dependent candidate for governor. You had best follow it, and get his answer by word of mouth. If he seems to hesitate, do your best to bring him around. He must be our man; no other will answer."

"I will do *mon possible*," Hazard returned, and hastily catching up his hat, he took his way to the Montcalm mansion.

The general was suffering from a slight attack of asthma, but he welcomed his young visitor cordially.

"I have just read the letter from your office," he said. "I thank you and your friends for the compliment implied in your request. If I were at liberty to consult my own inclinations, I might possibly accept your proposal, but—"

"I trust, general, that you are not going to decline to be brought forward in this campaign. I know you have retired from the political field, but duty to your State calls you back. It can not afford to miss you at a time when talent and integrity are so much needed at the helm of affairs. And the hour is ripe for success. The recent nominations created no enthusiasm. Norton, the Republican nominee, is a worn-out political hack. Heathcliff has a local strength, but it will tell against him in the State. He is too much identified with Wallport, and every town in the State is jealous of Wallport's prosperity. Your interests lie in the lower part of the State, and your reputation is national. Now is the opportunity for an independent candidate to come in and sweep the field. A man able, magnetic, of stainless public and private record, with his name haloed by memories of noble and self-sacrificing deeds in a by-gone struggle—such a man as General Rolff Montcalm," Hazard said, rising and bowing before the general with the grace of a young Mercury.

The ex-politician smiled, well pleased; his fine eyes kindled.

"Your words stir me as the bugle blast stirs the old war-



horse, my young friend," he said. "The passion for combat never dies out in the human animal, and I confess I feel like rushing to the fray; but there are considerations that hold me back. Money rather than merit decides the political contests of to-day; and I have not wherewithal to gild my armor sufficiently."

"Oh! as to that, did not Colonel Dyke's letter explain? La Rue, the banker, will furnish a heavy sum for campaign purposes, as much through hate of Heathcliff as liking for you. They are the rival rich men of the city, you know. Carleon will give liberally. Heathcliff has gained his ill-will by his action against gambling-saloons and the liquor business. Of course, general, a man of the world like you will not refuse to make use of a stepping-stone because it is put down by a hand not exactly clean. But may I ask if this money question is the only drawback to your acceptance?"

"It is not. That difficulty might be overcome. There is another which weighs on me more cogently. Mr. Heathcliff is the favorite candidate, and Mr. Heathcliff is my daughter's accepted suitor."

"Accepted?" The blood dropped from Hazard's glowing cheeks.

"I did not know; I had not heard that Heathcliff had been accepted," he almost stammered.

"Yes, three days ago. You see, there is an insuperable obstacle to my seizing the opportunity offered me."

"But," said Hazard, into whose mind had flashed the circumstance of the note he had read on Heathcliff's desk, with its "best and dearest." "But what if this obstacle were removed—if the engagement were broken?"

"Broken? Ira Heathcliff trifle with a daughter of Montcalm? He would not dare."

"Such was not my meaning. If Miss Montcalm should herself dissolve the engagement?"

"Honor is no coquette. She is deeply attached to her



betrothed. And Mr. Heathcliff is a man of unblemished character—a fine, strong nature.”

“Certainly,” interposed Hazard, wincing at this praise of his rival. “But—pardon my persistence—circumstances, now unforeseen, may occur to break off this tie. If this should be, will you then consent to have the ‘Rattler’ announce you as candidate for governor?”

“Why, yes; but—”

“Thanks; we will be discreetly silent until permitted to speak, though a few paragraphs thrown out as feelers may not be amiss. Once more, let me ask pardon for my importunity and thank you for allowing me to trespass so long upon your time. Good-morning, general.”

As Hazard walked through the hall on his way out of the house, a strain of music arrested his steps. The door of the drawing-room was open; he could see Miss Montcalm at the piano. She looked up, nodded to him, rose and came to the door.

The white jasmine that caught the folds of her lilac muslin robe at the throat was not whiter than the neck and face above it. Yet with this marble-like skin she had very dark eyes and brows, while her hair was a soft-bronze yellow—the color of young fern leaves when they first unroll. This rare combination increased the strangeness which gave an ideal charm to Honor Montcalm’s beauty.

“I have just left your father,” Hazard said, in explanation of his presence. “Your music drew me like a spell. Apropos of music, you are going, of course, to hear the opera to-night. For once the entire company is excellent, if we may trust the musical critics. It will be a rare treat for our city.”

“Yes. I am sorry to miss it; but I am due at Mrs. Duval’s to-night. Her party is in compliment to her sister, Miss Hunt, and it would be thought unkind if I failed to be there.”



“I, too, have a card from Mrs. Duval. May I be so happy as to attend you?”

“I am going with my father, if he is well enough. And Mr. Heathcliff will accompany us,” she added, a faint blush rising to her cheek.

“If Heathcliff should fail to come, may I take his place?”

She looked up in surprise.

“It is not likely that he will fail to come,” she said. Then, seeing that Hazard still looked at her with eyes of eager questioning, she added: “If anything should keep Mr. Heathcliff from coming, I will be glad to avail myself of your escort. I do not really think my father will care to go.”

“Thank you,” Hazard said, and bowed his adieu.

He had based his request solely upon those words written on the card that lay on Heathcliff’s table.

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## CHAPTER X.

AT eight o’clock that evening, Hazard rang the door bell at General Montcalm’s, and was shown into the drawing-room. No one was there. He walked the floor impatiently, listening for Heathcliff’s step. At length, there was a silken rustle, and Honor came in, fair and stately, wearing pure white with pearls.

“Mr. Heathcliff is late,” Hazard said.

She answered quietly, “He is not coming. I had a note from him a few hours ago.”

“His dereliction is my good fortune,” Hazard whispered, trembling with elation, as he folded the white opera-cloak about her. She seemed to resent his tone.

“Mr. Heathcliff has duties that can not yield to pastimes,” she said coldly. “And he supposed my father was going with me.”



“Then Heathcliff did not go to the opera. I heard—I mean I thought—”

“What?” she asked, giving him a sharp, level glance.

“Nothing; I spoke too fast. Shall we go now?”

“Yes,” she answered. But in spite of her haughty indifference, Hazard felt sure that his suggestion about the opera had sunk into her mind. He was not surprised at her ready assent to his proposal that they should look in at the opera before going to the party.

The curtain was up, the piece was in progress, as they took their seats. Hazard swept a hasty glance around the theater. He failed to see Heathcliff, but a second more careful survey showed him the object of his search, seated in a lace-curtained box.

And there was a woman beside him.

Only the outlines of her shape could be seen through the lace draperies, and these were half hidden by a light shawl. Her face was turned toward the stage. She wore a black bonnet and a black gauze veil. Hazard glanced at Honor. A slight flush mantled her usually marble cheek, her eyes were turned to the box where sat her affianced, who had broken his engagement with her, that he might take another woman to the opera. And that woman—what was she like? Hazard fervently hoped that she might prove young and beautiful. He had even a wild fancy that behind that veil might be the features of Laura Montcalm.

As the opera proceeded, the lady, evidently absorbed in the music, leaned further out of the box—beyond the shadow of the curtains. Hazard was watching her through his opera-glass. A sudden noise in the back part of the house made her turn her head quickly. Hazard gave vent to a muttered imprecation. The woman was old; the woman was hideously ugly. White hair and wrinkles and a nose large and hooked in shape could be seen by the aid of the glass in spite of the veil. But this was not all. One side of her face was very dark, nearly



black. He looked around at Miss Montcalm for an explanation. He could but notice how Honor's face had brightened.

"It is Miss Faust," she whispered. "The queer old-maid recluse who lives by herself in that gloomy old place, the Red House. She is dreadfully disfigured—is hump-shouldered and has a purple mark over all one side of her face. She is very sensitive to ridicule, wears a veil all the time, and never goes out or sees any one but Mr. Heathcliff. All her charities are dispensed through him; she is very kind-hearted and liberal to the poor. Her house has a wall around it, and a locked gate guarded by a dusky Cerberus. I have seen her out but once before; then she was riding with Mr. Heathcliff. She is music-mad, he told me once; that explains why she is out to-night, invalid though she is. Of course, Mr. Heathcliff had to come with her. He gave up the party that the poor old recluse might not miss a rare pleasure."

Her voice had a satisfied tone, which increased Hazard's irritation. He was keenly disappointed. He had hoped that singular note might lead to the discovery of some secret; but in Honor's words, he saw a very commonplace solution of the mystery. The writer was an invalid, this was the reason she feared her friend might think it "imprudent" for her to go out at night.

"What a fool I am," thought Hazard. "But why should she call him her best and dearest? Truly an odd fashion of addressing one's business manager. Phoo! women usually express themselves in an absurdly extravagant way."

Still, do what he might, he could not divest himself of the feeling that some mystery surrounded the writer of the note.

A shadowy suspicion stole into his mind. He turned to Honor:

"How long has Miss Faust been living here?" he asked.



“ Oh! a good many years. She came here with a consumptive brother when I was a school-girl. The brother died; she has only one other relative in the world, Mr. Heathcliff says—a brother who lives in Germany.”

“ She has lived here a good many years,” repeated Hazard, and his vague suspicion melted into nothing. But he kept the opera-glass fixed upon the veiled woman, watching her with a fascinated gaze.

When the curtain fell upon the first act Hazard and Miss Montcalm quitted the theater. Mr. Heathcliff had risen to make his way to Honor, but seeing that she was leaving, he paused. Their eyes met; his were anxious, deprecating; her beaming look reassured him. Hazard bit his lip in vexation. Evidently, Honor Montcalm regarded her future husband with implicit trust. How could he shake this proud faith?—he whom she thought of only as her father’s protégé? He had the first dance with her after they came into the ball-room. His hand trembled as it held hers; he feared she must notice it, but she was calmly unconscious. He led her to a seat, and a crowd of admirers came around her. She left them presently to take the arm of an old war comrade of her father, who had his wife on his other arm. Hazard stood looking after her fascinated, maddened by her sweet cold beauty.

“ She is a woman, therefore to be won,” he quoted at last. Then he quitted the ball-room and went back to the opera-house—not entering, only walking back and forth before the building, waiting till the play was over. At length, the crowd began pouring out of the doors, and soon he discerned the mayor’s tall form, overtopping all others; and, leaning heavily on his arm, was the veiled woman. The defect in her shape was plainly apparent now; and as she passed the gas-light near which Hazard was standing, he had a full view, through her veil, of the discolored half of her face.

But notwithstanding this, so strong was the impression



made upon him by the note, that he determined to follow Heathcliff and the eccentric old lady. They entered a handsome, quiet-looking carriage and he jumped into a waiting cab, spoke a word to the cabman, and was driven off in the direction the carriage had taken, keeping that vehicle in sight.

Hazard had seen the Red House, but never before had he noticed how isolated it was even in the midst of the city. It was situated on a large corner lot upon a hill, two sides of which were cut down to the pavement, forming a high, steep terrace, walled with rock. Surmounting this terrace was a spiked iron railing, and behind this a thick evergreen hedge. The grounds inside were deeply shaded with shrubbery and trees. Several live-oaks and magnolias were grouped about the tall, somber house, hiding even the roof from the view of those passing along the street below.

Half a dozen stone steps in the terrace led up to a gate in the iron fence. Heathcliff was handing the veiled woman up these steps as Hazard drove slowly past. The carriage had been sent away; the mayor was going in with the strange recluse.

The gate was unlocked by the "dusky Cerberus," the pair passed through, and were lost to sight.

Hazard signaled the cabman to stop when they reached the next block, and he alighted, dismissed the cab, and walked back to the gloomy corner house that held the objects of his curious attention.

So high and steep was the terrace that nothing could be seen beyond the spiked fence and the overtopping hedge. He crossed to the opposite side of the street. Standing there, he could see a mass of dark foliage rising up beyond the hedge, and through it one gable of the house. But there was no gleam of light proceeding from it.

He recrossed the street, and walked slowly around the triangular rock wall.

He was about to quit the place, and banish the vague



idea that any mystery attached to it, when he heard a sound of singing proceeding from the dark, silent old house. He stood still on the instant, and listened. Yes, it was the fragment of an air from the opera—"La Favorita"—which had been sung to-night.

And what a sweet, rich, fresh voice it was that trilled forth, and then was silent, as a bird suddenly sings out in its dream on some moonlight night, and then is as suddenly still.

The song-burst was just a few notes, that was all. It broke off, as though the singer had suddenly been checked by some warning thought or word.

But that strain was enough to excite Hazard's imagination.

"I don't go from here to-night until I make some effort to see what is inside this old house—regular nunnery-looking concern that it is," he said to himself. "That was never the voice of old Miss Faust—never."

He turned the corner and walked on until he reached the house adjoining Miss Faust's. It was inclosed by a neglected fence, and the building inside was tall, narrow and very much dilapidated. A placard on the door announced that it was "To Rent."

Hazard looked about him. No policeman was in sight. He put his hands on the paling and sprang lightly over into the yard. He went round to the side adjoining the domain of Miss Faust; here separating the two lots, he found the same iron-spiked brick wall and overtopping hedge that shut in the Red House on the front and sides. Trees and thick shrubbery also filled the back yard, and only a portion of the rear walls and roof could be seen.

But Hazard caught the gleam of light playing on the tops of some tall oleander shrubs growing near the wall. Evidently the light came through an open window of the Red House.

If he could only see into that window!



From its secluded situation in the rear of the building, and at the end furthest from the street, he imagined this must be a very private boudoir or bedroom. If there was any mysterious inmate of the Red House who wished to be unseen and unsuspected, this would probably be her sanctuary. Here, believing herself safe from observation, screened by trees, and with only a vacant house adjoining, she would feel safe to open her window for the sake of fresh air; perhaps to stand before it and reveal herself to the gaze of one who might secure a post of observation. If he could only obtain such a post! Hazard looked about him. Close at hand was a tall magnolia-tree. He was active as a catamount, and, with an agile spring, he caught the lower bough and swung himself to a seat in the tree. Then he climbed higher—climbed until he reached a point on a level with the window whence the light proceeded. The blind was open, the curtain withdrawn. He could see a lighted and prettily furnished interior—pictures on the wall, and a handsome dressing-case and tall mirror, but no occupant—no living presence. Well, he would wait until he did see some one—wait an hour if necessary. His position in the tree was rather cramped, but that did not matter. He did not mind discomfort when he had an object in view. Otherwise, he was amusingly luxurious in his predilections for one of his Bohemian lot.

Moments passed. His enthusiasm was beginning to die out, when again he heard a bird-like note—another strain from “*La Favorita*”—tender, sweet, sad. It was as brief and stopped as suddenly as before. While it still lingered in Hazard’s ears, a bat fluttered before his eyes, momentarily obscuring the view. When he looked again, the space in front of the table with the canary’s cage was occupied. A woman stood there—a woman dressed in black, as Miss Faust had been, but wholly unlike the old recluse in shape; neither bowed nor stoop-shouldered, but tall, slender, beautifully formed, with a graceful neck and finely poised head.



Her back was turned to Hazard, but he felt sure she must be young. The curves of the form, the carriage of the head, all indicated youth. She had a light, black lace square thrown over her head, and Hazard could not see her hair, but he was certain he caught gleams of gold through the meshes. She put out her hand to the cage, and passed her fingers through the wires to caress the bird that had wakened and was fluttering on its perch. She leaned over and sung a little, short, sweet trill—joyous this time—a merry good-night to her feathered friend. Hazard had taken out his opera-glass, and was intently examining the figure, the neck, the hand of this graceful shape.

“Why doesn’t she turn round?” he said to himself in an excited whisper; but at that very instant his hopes were cruelly nipped. The heavy curtain fell across the window, effectually shutting in the room and its occupant. Who had drawn the curtain? Hazard was almost ready to swear it was a man’s black-coated arm that he had seen, though he had the merest glimpse of it as the curtain dropped. He remained some time in his tree-perch, but, finding there was nothing to be gained, he came down, and made his way back to the street and to the front of the Red House. He ascended the steps and rang the bell of the gate. A shuffling step was heard approaching. But the gate was not opened. The negro Cerberus put his mouth close to it and demanded in a low growl:

“Who is yer, and what yer want dis time er night?”

“I have a package for the young lady who lives here—Miss—plague upon it! I can’t think of her name.”

“No young lady live here. No lady ’tall live here but ole Miss Faust.”

“But there is a lady visiting here, younger than Miss Faust.”

“No, dey ain’t, nuther. Don’t yer contydic me again. No lady in dis house but Miss Faust. Now, you go ’long wid yerself an’ yer package.”



There was an honest ring in the old negro's voice; but Hazard was not convinced. He felt sure there was another and younger woman than Miss Faust in the house. That shape, that voice, could not belong to the crooked old recluse.

Miss Montcalm was waiting for him when he got back to Mrs. Duval's. As he led her to the carriage, he said:

"So Mr. Heathcliff did not come here after the opera."

"The opera is not yet over, I suppose."

"It has been over for the last hour. Mr. Heathcliff went home with Miss Faust. He sent away the carriage and went in. He has been there ever since—listening to music, for one thing. A delicious, fresh voice; I heard it; yet you said that Miss Faust never has visitors."

"I said what was true. Mr. Heathcliff told me that no visitor but himself ever crossed her threshold. Doubtless you were mistaken. The voice was not fresh."

Hazard did not reply. He was mentally calling himself a fool for having allowed jealousy to get the better of discretion. It was just possible that in this Red House matter might exist a clew to the problem he had in hand, and now his unguarded speech to Honor might be the means of forestalling any further investigation. She would be sure to ask Heathcliff about that fresh young voice and he would be put upon his guard. On the other hand, it was all-important, Hazard reasoned, that Honor should have her trust in her lover shaken. The engagement between them must come to an end; everything depended on this—everything for him; everything for the large party who were opposed to the late nominations. If the engagement was broken up, he might enter the lists for Honor's favor with a chance of success, while the general would enter the political contest with almost a certainty of coming out ahead. And in the event of his election, he would be sure to reward himself (Hazard) with some position that would



prove a stepping-stone to his ambition. As his mind ran swiftly along this chain of thought, he determined to tell Miss Montcalm about the woman he had seen through the window, first asking her to be silent. "A promise of silence from any other woman that I know wouldn't be worth a sixpence," he said to himself, "but this girl was brought up by her father. She has a man's notion of honor. If she makes a promise she will keep it."

After they had driven to her home, he detained her on the moonlit porch.

"I told you about the voice I heard singing in the Red House," he said, "but that was not all. There is something stranger still—strange in view of your assertion that the house has no white occupant but the old maid recluse. I would like to tell you under your promise that you will never speak of it."

"I do not like to give such a promise," she said. "I think you had better not tell me what you saw."

"But I very much wish to tell you, because you may help me by some suggestion. The matter is connected with my efforts to fulfill a mission intrusted to me by your father—a secret mission."

"Why not speak of it to him?"

"Because it is so vague—just a shadow—the kind of thing a woman's quick instinct sometimes grasps when man's reason is baffled."

She said: "I know of the mission my father intrusted to you." And then, after a pause, "I promise not to speak to any one of what you may tell me."

"It is this: There is a mystery about the Red House. You tell me and the old negro janitor tells me, there is no one there but Miss Faust, yet I heard that voice—the voice of a young woman, I will swear—and I saw the figure of a woman, well-shaped and graceful, standing in an upper room at the back of the house, the windows of which can not be seen from the street."



“How then did you manage to see the woman?”

He laughed and told her.

“A detective must not stickle at means to gain his end,” he said.

She listened, and was silent for a minute. Then she said coldly:

“You did not see the woman’s face, you had only a glimpse of her figure. You might easily have been mistaken. You *must* have been mistaken. The person you saw must have been Miss Faust herself.”

“Miss Faust! that misshapen old woman! You do not think me blind, do you? It is plain you will not heed anything that casts a doubt upon Heathcliff. Would Miss Faust be likely to call him in a note, ‘My best and dearest’?”

“What do you mean?”

“Simply that I saw to-day—no matter how—a note to Heathcliff from a woman asking him to take her to the opera to-night, and calling him ‘my best and dearest.’”

“This is absurd. Mr. Heathcliff took Miss Faust to the opera.”

“Yes, the other woman—the writer of the note—was left at the Red House. It was not considered safe for her to appear in public—thickly veiled though she would no doubt have been.”

“Mr. Hall, I do not share your suspicions, and I must ask you not to trouble me with them any more; at least, so far as you connect them with Mr. Heathcliff.”

“So Miss Montcalm’s love chooses to be blind and deaf. Your father has told me that you have promised to marry Heathcliff. You think him a perfect Bayard, incapable of dishonor; I trust, for your sake, he may prove so. Meantime I have my doubts as to his infallibility, and I shall—watch him.”

She looked at him with eyes full of scorn.

“Allow me to say good-night,” she said with scarcely a



motion of her proud head, as she turned away. He stepped before her, bending his black-curled head low:

“Forgive me. I was presumptuous,” he murmured, and stretched out his hand. He was handsome, gifted, daring, her father’s favorite. She hesitated a little, and then extended her hand to meet his. He caught it to his lips and kissed it.

“You *must* forgive me, for I love you,” he cried passionately, and rushed away.

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## CHAPTER XI.

HAZARD lost no time in inquiring after John Bowen, the man who had testified to seeing Mrs. Montcalm enter the premises of Heathcliff, the night of the murder. He was annoyed at finding that the carpenter no longer lived at Wallport. He had moved away six months before. Nor could the neighbors tell him where the man had removed to.

“Bowen was a mighty rovin’ fellow,” they said. “On-sartain as a March day. He jes’ got onsatisfied in his mind, and picked up his traps and his wife and children, and off he put up the Brightby Road—said he’d keep a-goin’ till he found where he could better himself.”

“Well, I don’t think he went fur,” put in an old woman, who sat on the stoop of a squatty cottage with a pipe in her mouth, which she removed, and knocking the ashes from the bowl, put into her apron pocket. “His money wouldn’t hold out. I seen Miss Bowen countin’ it the night afore they started. T’warn’t no big pile.”

There was to be a political meeting at Rock Spring, a town on the Brightby Road, not a great distance from Wallport. Norton, the Republican nominee, and some of his clan, would open the campaign by speeches.

“Carne must go up to report the affair for ‘The Rattler,’ ” Dyke said.



“It is about time for Carne to get on his periodical spree,” commented young Hall. “You had better let me go, colonel; this is the opening of the battle, and ought to be reported in a way that will tell—for our side.”

“Well, you’ll have to go, I suppose, though you are needed here, and we can hardly spare you.”

“If luck favors me, I’ll kill two birds with one shot—report the meeting and find Bowen,” thought Hazard.

The meeting was held at Rock Spring, a county town that had recently doubled its population, owing to the discovery of mineral springs near its site. It had become a summer resort of considerable fame, and had now a number of buildings in process of erection.

“I ought to find Bowen here,” mused Hazard, as his train steamed into the town; “there seems plenty doing in his line.”

It was nearly dusk, but before he went to bed, Hazard had made the discovery that the carpenter was indeed a citizen of Rock Spring, and was doing well.

Soon after breakfast the next morning, Hall set out to look up his man. He found him in his work-shop putting the finishing touches to a neat paneled door.

He was a lank, ungainly individual, with a thin, cleanly shaved visage, restless gray eyes and a half-quizzical, half-pathetic expression. From his looks and the tone of his evidence at the inquest, Hazard drew the inference that he was an oddity, and decided that he would not approach him in any capacity that would put him on his guard in answering questions. Possibly he had a superstitious dislike to testifying under oath. Hazard introduced himself as a person wanting to have a house built, and desirous to find out the cost of materials and of building; also to be shown the model of a neat, cheap cottage. Bowen made the estimate as to cost in a few minutes, but lingered over the model.

“I am no professed designer,” he said; “but I know a



thing or two about a house, enough to see that the fellow, Hines, in Wallport, as calls himself an architectural artist, knows no more about building than a common jackleg carpenter. See that house he designed for old Judge Bond—all out of plumb.”

“Did he design the house at the corner of Davis and Wade Streets? It’s vacant now, but I believe Captain Montcalm lived in it.”

“He? No, indeed. My uncle that’s dead, old Billy Bowen, put up that house. He could a-taught Hines his a-b-c in building. So the Montcalm house is vacant, you say. Well, no wonder. I’d be scared to live in it myself after that murder. They say the blood stains never have come up; no, and they won’t till the murderer is found and punished.”

“The murderer was his own wife, I believe.”

“They say so, but it’s hard to think it. She was such a sweet one to look at.”

“But if she was innocent, why did she run away? Why didn’t she come forward and explain? She left the house secretly that night—so I read in the papers; I was not in this part of the country—and was never seen afterward.”

“Yes, she was seen afterward. A certain man saw her that same night—all muffled and disguised-like—going into Heathcliff’s house—him that’s Mayor of Wallport now.”

“Is it possible? Yes, I remember reading a statement to that effect among the inquest evidence, but it was set aside—proved a mistake, I think.”

The carpenter turned one eye up knowingly at his interlocutor and seemed about to speak, but thought better of it, and went on silently with his work. As though by accident Hazard let drop from his pocket a flask filled with whisky.” He caught it dexterously and offered Mr. Bowen a drink. The carpenter took a generous draught, and under the influence of the whisky and of Hazard’s magnetic geniality, he relaxed from his cautious attitude and waxed



confidential. He resumed his talk about the Montcalm murder and avowed that he was the man who had seen Mrs. Montcalm enter the house of the mayor; that there was no mistake about it; he had bamboozled his questioners at the inquest on purpose. "It's not John Bowen who's a-goin' to swear a man's neck into a noose," he said, "let alone a woman's. I've had enough bad luck in my life without puttin' myself in the shadow of the gallows in that style. I got into the evidence scrape unbeknownst. You see there had been a poor man's frolic up at our house a day or so before, and old Miss Simpson—a long-tongued gossip she is, too—was there a-nursin' wife and the new baby. She heard me tell about seein' Laura, and she up and tells it when there came the hue and cry about the killin' and about Montcalm's wife bein' the murderer. I was summoned to give evidence when the inquest sot on the body, but not much did they make outer John Bowen. I jis talked careless and wild-like, 'lowed it might a been the housekeeper, as if old Miss Brumby could carry herself like that queen of womankind—Laura Montcalm, let alone look like her in face. The housekeeper said it were half past ten o'clock when she got back. I wasn't sure of the exact time I had seen my woman, so I told 'em it might a been ten or half past, or might a been nine. They sniffed at such shifty evidence and told me I might sit down. But I knew who *did* know the time to a second, and that was my wife. Let her alone for keepin' my time after dark as close as a factory overseer. She says it was jest twenty minutes to ten when I got home; and as it took me about ten minutes to walk there from Heathcliff's, it were about half past nine when I saw Laura—jest an hour before the time the housekeeper come home."

"Then you will swear it was Mrs. Montcalm you saw?"

The man looked up suspiciously.

"Who said anything about swearin'?" he growled.

Hazard hastened to retrieve his blunder.



“Pardon me; the word slipped out without my knowing it. I meant to say that you were pretty sure then, it was Mrs. Montcalm you saw?”

“Pretty sure! I’m as certain of it as that I’ve got this rule in my hand. I knew her well—that is, I knew the way she looked and walked. I had been hired on her place to make some summer-houses and fancy pigeon-cotes, and she come right often to look at the work. A pretty woman like that is bound to catch a man’s eye and stay in his mind. I thought I knew her walk that night, before I came up with her. I was about to pass her when she stopped at Heathcliff’s gate. Her veil blew to one side and I got a look at her face—jest one glimpse, but I saw her as plain as I see you. I thought her visit to Heathcliff’s was curious, and I stopped and watched her. She didn’t go up the front steps and ring the door-bell; she went round the side of the house, out of sight of where I stood, but I knowed Heathcliff’s study-room was on that side, and the windows was low and opened on a little porch with a sight of vines hanging about it. Presently, I heard three soft taps upon window-glass, as if it was a signal. I never told that at the inquest; and it’s jest between us now,” said Mr. Bowen, taking another pull at the flask. “And now for business,” he continued. “You like that plan of a cottage, you say. Well, in five minutes I’ll tell you how many feet of lumber it’ll take to build such a house. Good-morning. What can I do for you?” to a fair, pleasant-looking young man who had entered the shop.

“Those frames for scenery that were ordered, are they ready?”

“Oh, you are one of them show folks that wanted fixin’s for the hall. Yes, they’re ready.”

“All right—I’ll call a dray and send them over to the theater—hall, I mean. What do I owe you? I’ll settle now. And see here; can’t you take tickets to the perform-



ance this evening as part pay for the job? We'll hardly make expenses in your town."

"Tickets? I don't think I care about 'em. I never like to take my pay out in chips and whetstones. What sort of a show have you got? Anythin' lively—tumblin', sword-swallowin', clog-dancin', or the like?"

"Tumbling and sword-swallowing! Man alive! Ours is a high-toned show. We play Shakespeare and British comedy. See this play-bill. 'Grand Family Combination—M. Ducciole and his accomplished wife, Mme. Marianne Ducciole, his charming daughter, the celebrated emotional actress, Mlle. Carlotta Ducciole—the young Messieurs his sons—Auguste and François—whose fine appearance and rare talents make them stars of the stage. Also the charming *soubrette* and unrivaled *danseuse*, Mlle. Celeste Vivien. In the orchestra the company have secured, at great expense, two fine artists, Signor Petruchio—the musical phenomenon, a more wonderful automaton player than Blind Tom, and Herr Maximilian Rubenstein, the matchless violoncellist,' meaning yours truly," said the blonde young man, bowing to the carpenter, and touching his chest with his forefinger. "The performance this evening will consist of five of the most stirring scenes in 'Macbeth,' Shakespeare's masterpiece, you know—and a delightful fantastic drama, full of song and dance, called 'The Knight's Temptation,' with the beautiful Celeste in the leading character. The orchestra will give the overture of—"

"Hold on, young man. You addle my brains. I'll see my wife about them tickets. It's likely she'll want to go and take her mam and all the young ones. You needn't settle now; I'll see you again."

"Thanks; you had better take a couple of tickets now, though."

"I'll take a couple, Max," called out Hazard from his perch on the work-bench. He sat there whittling a stick



and observing, unnoticed by him, the new-comer from under his slouched hat.

“Hazard Hall, by all the gods of Olympus,” cried the other, rushing up and embracing the young journalist with fervor. “Old chum and room-mate, what are you doing here?”

“I am a political envoy, may it please you. And you, Max, what in the mischief does this mean? I left you an ambitious painter covering a ponderous canvas with a battle scene you were sure would make your fame, and I find you with the brush exchanged for the buskin—following the fortunes of strolling play people. How comes it?”

“Ambitious dreams don’t furnish bread and butter. I had to live while I waited for fame, and starving is a lonesome sort of business. So when Mr. Duck made up his troupe and offered—”

“Ah, my prophetic heart!” interrupted Hazard. “It struck me when you were expounding the play-bill that Monsieur Ducciole was no other than our old acquaintance, Jere Duck, of the St. Louis tenement house—I beg his pardon—Professor Duyck; Professor of Shakespeare and the Divine Histrionic Art—as his cards read—who taught me how to rant as Hamlet in the days when I fancied myself the coming stage luminary. So Monsieur Ducciole is no other than our big-hearted, cranky professor?”

“ ‘The same, the same,

Letters four do form his name. ”

“And Madame Marianne Ducciole is good Mother Duck—Polly Ann the professor called her—and Mademoiselle Carlotta is Miss Charlotte—dear little Lottie—my first flirtee; and Gus and Frank—those awful hobbledehoy—are Messieurs Auguste and François, and the musical artist, Herr Maximilian Rubenstein, secured at such great expense, is my jolly chum—Max. But the aliens of the company—Signor Petruchio, the musical phenomenon, and the entrancing Mademoiselle Celeste Vivien—who are they?”



“Signor Petruchio is indescribable; you must see him; but Mademoiselle Celeste — can’t you guess, Hazard? Don’t you remember Kildee—*my* child.”

“Kildee, Kildee? What, not that little estray the Ducks adopted? that big-eyed elf they picked up somewhere in the street, I believe. Stay, what am I thinking of? It was you who found the waif, Max—somewhere, before I knew you—and played the paternal to her until the Ducks took her under their wing.”

“I found her in a garret room of that same moldy old tenement house some years before I had the honor of your acquaintance. She had been tied to a bed-leg by her scamp of a mother and left to starve. She was half famished, but too frightened to cry out, and she clung to me like a scared kitten, when I took her on my shoulder. She was seven years old, but no bigger than a child of four. I was a lubberly boy of seventeen working in a drug store and dabbling at pictures every spare moment. How to keep her was a puzzle, but I left off meat and beer, and managed to find such a bird as she in bread and milk and shoes. Some good women helped me about her frocks. For two years I was her only parent, then the Ducks kindly took charge of her for me. Papa and Mamma Duck have been as good as could be to the waif, but Lottie—bless her! has been a little mother to the child.”

“Lottie was always a trump. I’ll never forget how she played the stern nurse and made me swallow the doctor’s prescriptions when I had that hard fever in the old, rat-haunted tenement house. I remember, too, how soft little Kildee’s hand was upon my head. How came you to call her Kildee, Max? Was it her true name?”

“No; she was called Jasmina, she told us. It was too much name for such a mite, so we called her Kildee.”

“It suits her, or it suited her then. What does she look like now? She was an eerie sprite then—all eyes and hair.”



“She is still small, but rounded and well-shaped.”

“Pretty?”

“Pretty’s not the word,” said Max, glowing. “She is the loveliest thing in the world.”

“Ah, ha! I see how the land lies. I perceive why Max Rubin, artist, has laid his dreams of artistic success on the shelf, and turned scene-painter and musician in Monsieur Ducciole’s troupe. Are you engaged to your protégée, my noble Herr?”

“Nonsense!” Max colored to the roots of his fair hair. “Kildee is still a child. She likes me, as she does Lottie and Lottie’s brothers.”

“And you—?”

“Why, I always called her my child.”

“Yes, I remember your paternal airs—how careful you were that she should have thick soles, and how you tried to scold her for burning holes in her apron. And I mind me of a certain *tableau*, my gentle Herr. A blonde youth, with a curly haired sprite on his knee, feeding her with cherries, their stems held between his teeth, whence she cropped the fruit with her pretty lips, a sly way to get unlimited kisses. Does she kiss you as freely now, Max?”

“No,” said the other, shortly, flushing, and looking annoyed. “She is not a child any more”—forgetting his previous assertion. “But come along to the hotel. You are surely going to see your old friends?”

“I surely am, but not just now. I have to attend a political meeting, and report the speeches for our journal. I am a shining newspaper light now in the city of Wallport. Plenty of work, precious little fun, and less money. Give my love to Lottie, and a kiss to Kildee, and tell them—”

“See here, Hazard,” Max interrupted, “you mustn’t tease Kildee in that reckless way when you meet her. She is fearless and frank-hearted as when you knew her, a child; but she has a sweet dignity with it. She was brought up by Bohemians, it’s true, but Mrs. Duck is as honest a



woman as breathes, and Lottie is a good girl, for all her free ways.”

“I know it, *mon camerade*. Trust me, I’ll say nothing to ruffle the plumage of a fowl or a bird of your flock,” Hazard said, caressing Max’s broad shoulder.

Then he went to the part of the shop where Bowen was at work, and had a few words more with the carpenter, while Max took his leave.

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## CHAPTER XII.

BUT Hazard was so occupied with the political meeting that he failed to remember the promised visit to his old acquaintances until rather late in the afternoon, when he met Max in the street, as he was on his way to the telegraph office.

“I’ll come in half an hour,” he said to him, and he bought a bouquet from a fruit and flower stand close by and sent it by Max to Lottie. That “Prima’s” little heart had been in a flutter ever since she knew she was likely to see again the dark eyes which had looked into hers too often for her peace in the days when they both lived in the cheap tenement house in St. Louis, and when the young reporter—trying his restless energies in various flights—had taken lessons in stage lore from her papa, the then retired actor, whose card in the newspaper read: “Prof. Duyck, instructor in Shakespeare and Histrionic Art.” The professor thought it only a professional license to introduce the Y into his name in such connection. Besides, it might ward off the malicious suggestion of “quack,” which had often wounded his spirit, the suggestiveness of name being further accentuated by his appearance—his short, plump body and duck-legs.

Lottie, in her new blue dress, with her hair arranged as Hazard used to like it, had flitted nervously all day about



the three rooms occupied by the company at the Rock Spring Hotel. She caught up her guitar, threw its blue ribbon over her white neck and sung to it a snatch of the song that had been his favorite—the last she had sung for him on the evening he left her to seek his fortune, first in New Orleans, afterward in Wallport. Ah, that last evening! Lottie's heart swelled under her blue bodice, as she recalled the tender nothings he had murmured as they sat, touching each other, on the balcony. The surroundings were anything but romantic, yet transfigured by Lottie's sentimental fancy, they seemed so. There was a moon—never mind that it shone on brick walls and dingy roofs instead of groves and honeysuckle bowers. A cat squalled on an adjacent shed and the professor snored as he lay on the lounge in the inner room, but the sounds had a nightingale melody to Lottie, so full of romance was her foolish little heart. She recalled it all as she sat with the guitar ribbon round her neck, looking at herself in the dressing-case mirror to see if the three years that had passed since then had traced any lines on her peach-bloom skin. Kildee, sitting on a low chair and rocking softly as she sewed, looked at her and wondered what she was thinking of. But Kildee was practical.

“Bring me your kid slippers, dear, and let me whiten them up a bit,” she said presently. “I have finished sewing this gilt braid on Frank's jacket. Naughty boy, to be always ripping it off.”

“Gus did it with his clumsy sword-thrusts in that fencing scene,” complained the boy, who was lolling on a lounge near by, yawning over his part for the evening. “Gus will punch my eyes out some day, and then father will be satisfied he can never play at swords.”

Mother Duck—beg pardon, Madame Ducciole—with her ample proportions buried in an arm-chair, fanned her plump, heated cheeks and read a novel. Presently she looked up:



“ Dear, dear, I forgot that awful grease spot on my purple silk where I dropped the sausage when professor told me it was my time to go on the stage. Professor is so impetuous. He rushed behind the scenes and grabbed my arm just as I had the sausage between my teeth. I really wish he wasn’t so nervous, but he says it’s the way with genius; and now I shall have to wear it, grease and all, in that banquet scene to-night.”

“ I took the grease out with a hot iron last night, Aunt Polly,” said Kildee, without looking up from the soiled slipper she was renovating by rubbing it with an enamel card.

“ Thanks, child; but, Kildee, you forget again. You called me Aunt Polly. Professor doesn’t like it. Remember to say Aunt Marianne.”

“ I’ll try,” said the girl, smiling; “ but Polly suits you best, auntie. It’s sweet and jolly and motherly—like you.”

“ Kildee, I wish you’d see if I know my lines,” said Frank, rising from the lounge and lazily approaching, book in hand.

“ Kildee, honey,” said the professor, coming in from the next room with his wig awry, “ it’s six o’clock—soon time for me to be at the hall again; and I’ve got a splitting headache, what with worrying over fixing that stage and listening to the hammering and trying to drill those stupid supes. I do wish, child, you’d make me a decent cup of ten. The slops they have here make me sick.”

“ Polly, put the kettle on, and let’s have tea,”

sung Frank, pulling one of Kildee’s curls.

She got up and put the renovated slippers into a big basket containing costumes, etc., that was presently to be carried down to the scene of the performance. Then she opened a tall, narrow box—originally Mother Duck’s bonnet-box—and took out of it a small oil-stove, a package of



good tea and a little metal pot. Frank lighted the stove lamp, and in a little while the pot was in place over the fire. While waiting for it to boil, Kildee took Frank into a corner and heard him recite his lines, prompting and suggesting in a low tone, so as not to attract the professor's attention. Frank declared it put him "out of sorts" to have his father correct him in his loud, pompous fashion.

"You are a good girl, and I love you better than Lottie," said the tall, handsome young fellow, giving her his favorite caress—a pull at one of the short, nut-brown curls on her neck. Max saw it as he opened the door, and winced a little; then abused himself mentally, as he had done every day since he made the discovery that jealousy was beginning to be mixed with what he still told himself was the half-brotherly, half-paternal love he felt for Kildee.

Max had a great bouquet of roses and carnations in one hand; the other hand he held behind him. Lottie flew to him and caught the flowers.

"For me! Say they are for me!" she cried.

"They are. Hall sent them. He will be here, he says, in half an hour. He has been very busy all day, but his heart has been with you, so he desired me to say; I am not prepared to guarantee the assertion."

Lottie buried her face in the bouquet, to hide the blush that made her cheeks as pink as the roses.

"You must keep them fresh; they'll be lovely for you to wear to-night," said Kildee, coming forward.

"You shall have part of them," Lottie declared.

Kildee shook her head.

"I won't consent to rob you of a single rose," she said.

Max still held one hand behind him.

"Come here, little one," he said to Kildee. "Did you think you were forgotten?"

He drew his hand from behind him, bringing into view a bouquet, smaller than Lottie's, but composed of exquisite flowers—white and delicately tinted and fragrant.



“Yours,” he said, and gave it to her. She caught it in both hands and held it up. She whirled around in delight.

“Hazard is generous with his gifts,” Lottie said, a faint shadow stealing over her face.

“Hazard indeed! Do you imagine he sent it? Hazard has forgotten my existence. He never did fancy me—muchly—used to tease me hatefully, I remember, and cropped my kitten’s ears once. No, *my* flowers came from somebody else—somebody who never forgets me,” she said, raising her brown eyes to Max and laying her head against his shoulder in the frankly affectionate way he had liked so well awhile ago, but of late, somehow, did not find so satisfying. Awhile ago, too, he would have stooped and kissed her with a frankness equal to her own. He did not kiss her now. He touched her curly head with his plump, white hand; he stroked it gently, and if she had been observant she would have felt the tremor in his fingers. None of them noticed it; none of them paid any attention to him. It seemed a matter of course to pet Kildee, as it was to take advantage of her nimble fingers and deft, quick movements, her readiness to help and her womanly wise devices.

The professor broke up the *tableau*. He had gone into the other room while waiting for his tea; he came out this time, looking more worried than before.

“Everything goes wrong,” he said. “St. Peter is in the sulks and won’t touch his violin. He’ll not play a note to-night. He is sitting with his head between his hands, and won’t even look up.”

“Kildee can bring him around. She always can,” said Mrs. Duck, soothingly. “Go to him, Kildee.”

Kildee had already gone.

Gus, who came from the room presently, reported that Kildee had coaxed St. Peter round so far as to make him sit up and look at her.

In a little while she came in, leading by the hand a re-



markable-looking being—a man well-proportioned, but gaunt and thin, with a long, pallid face and long, snow-white hair and beard, contrasting strangely with his young-looking features. These indicated a man scarcely thirty, while the expression that pervaded them was almost child-like. They indicated also refinement. His head was well shaped—the forehead broad and full. This made it most strange to see the blank vacancy of the eyes. They had a bewildered, wistful look, as of a lost child, and there was a child-like pathos in the droop of the mouth.

“I have brought him in here because this room is brighter and prettier, and he has the dumps worse than usual, poor dear,” said Kildee. “I think his head hurts him. Auntie, let him have the arm-chair, please. I know what’ll brighten him—egg-nog; I’ll make him some.”

“Where will you get the eggs, Kildee?”

“You never mind, Mr. Frank, I’ll not trouble you. I go provided for St. Peter.”

She deposited her charge in the easy-chair, and then drew out the ex-bonnet box and brought out of its depths a couple of eggs that had been packed in cotton in a little box to themselves.

“Why the mischief were not those eggs demolished by the baggage-smasher?” asked Frank wonderingly.

“Because they are guinea eggs, stupid—nearly as hard-shelled as your cranium; shall I try conclusions?” and she made a feint of breaking one upon his head.

She set him to stirring the yolks for St. Peter’s beverage, while she beat the whites, standing before St. Peter, and talking to him cheerfully. The regular sound and motion of the egg-beating aroused the daft creature’s sense of rhythmic harmony—the strongest instinct of his nature. He moved his head in time to it; he looked about him wistfully, then at Kildee.

“He wants his fiddle; go and bring it to him,” Kildee said to Frank.



When the instrument was put into his hands, he made a few languid passes of the bow across the strings. Kildee touched his hand:

“See here, St. Peter,” she said; “I am waiting for you to play that I may dance. And I’ll keep time; see?”

She began to move her pretty feet dance-fashion, while she continued the egg-beating. He nodded and began to play at once, smiling at her as she danced and beat her eggs at the same time. Her pretty gray gown came just to the tops of her tiny boots, and the play of her feet and the ease and grace of her motions were a joy to see. It had been a delight, the professor said, to teach Kildee to dance. She took to it by instinct. He had an exalted estimate of his own family’s proficiency in this accomplishment, and he meant it as high praise of Kildee when he told his friends—“She dances, sir, like a born Duck”—meaning one of his own flock.

The egg-nog was made and Kildee gently took away the Saint’s violin and gave him a goblet of the frothing nectar instead. He tasted it and testified his approval by smiling in his dazed, wistful way into her face.

“Ah, he’s all right,” pronounced the professor, who had had his tea with a dash of rum in it, and was again in spirits, ready to greet Hazard, who now entered on the scene, with effervescent rhetoric. Mrs. Duck’s welcome was hearty; she had warmly liked the handsome boy and had cherished hopes of adding him to the family.

Lottie’s piquant face was beaming with delight and blushes as she held out her hand.

“You know all of us,” she said, looking around at the group. “Gus and Frank have grown out of the pea-green stage since you saw them. Gus is our villain, which accounts for the scowl he has developed; Frank is our lover. We are quite proud of his mustache; it is the ‘early variety’ as we say of potatoes. Mamma here has grown younger, and Kildee taller and plumper, and—”



“And Lottie lovelier,” whispered Hazard.

“For shame! You have not outgrown your propensity to flatter,” laughed the sparkling little actress.

“But here is some one I do not know,” said Hazard, looking with curiosity at the strange figure seated in the arm-chair, sipping egg-nog. The blank face, the bewildered, questful eyes, the odd, child-like dignity, the white hair and the smooth skin. The figure struck him as picturesque and quaint in the highest degree.”

“Oh, this is Signor Petruchio—our musical phenomenon—otherwise St. Peter.”

“St. Peter?”

“You see the Ducciole Family Company carry their Saint along with them. The fun-making St. Louis gamins gave the poor dear that name because of his white beard and queer face, I suppose. He is inspired as to music, like Blind Tom—and a stark idiot in everything else.”

“Oh, Lottie, he is listening to you!” cried Kildee, reproachfully. “Remember he can hear though he doesn’t talk except in disjointed words. He is not an idiot. His soul has just gone out from him into his violin. His violin talks for him, pleads and laughs and moans for him—oh, so well.”

Hazard turned and looked at the girl more attentively. Some ring in her voice was strangely familiar to him. And who was it she resembled? Why could he not think? The little high-bred way she carried her head, the dignity that was blended with her child-like grace, the winning beauty of her smile—the very droop of her eyelids reminded him of some one he had lately seen. He knitted his brow in perplexed thought, but Lottie was claiming his attention.

“It is the strangest thing in the world,” she was saying. “He understands nothing but music. Music must have been an instinct with him, and when he lost his reason (through illness or accident I think, for that head shows he was never born an idiot) why the instinct stayed behind.



Instincts do stay, you know, when reason goes. He plays divinely—difficult compositions too. He had learned them by note, before his misfortune, or else he had caught them by ear, as Blind Tom does.”

“Some day he may recover his reason—suddenly,” Hazard said, looking hard at the singular being, who, strange to note, raised his head at the same time and looked into Hazard’s face with the wistful intent expression one sees in the eyes of dogs.

“When and where did you find him, Lottie?”

“He is Kildee’s discovery. She was walking on a back street in St. Louis one afternoon when she saw a group of gamins tormenting a white-haired man. They had taken away his hat and fiddle and were trying to get at his squirrel. They had seen the little animal run into his shirt bosom for refuge. He was frantically gesticulating, appealing, threatening in a broken jabber, which only excited the little imps’ derision and made them worse. Kildee looked around for a policeman, but, as usual with that fraternity when they are wanted—there was none to be seen. She knew it would be useless to remonstrate with the boys. They would only jeer at her; so what does our Kildee do, but begin to sing and dance—and she dances like an angel, as you ought to remember. The gamins left off tormenting the man, and when she stopped they begged for another dance. ‘Not unless you restore my uncle his hat and his fiddle,’ said our girl. ‘Then he can play for me, and I will dance properly.’

“The hat and fiddle were at once restored and Kildee kept her promise. She began to dance, and the queer being began to play and played deliciously. She rounded up her *pas final* with a farewell courtesy and was running off, when the odd genius caught her skirt. She turned and held out her hand and he kissed it devoutly. From that time he took on allegiance to her. He followed her home; he would not leave her. Fortunately we found we could



put him to use. We were troubled about music. He could play with so much soul and science in one that he always delights an audience. Nobody claimed him. He was daft, but harmless, so we took him traveling with us. He passes as a distinguished foreign *artist musicale*, who couldn't or wouldn't deign to speak English, and folks actually take on about his dignity, and call his idiocy—the eccentricities of genius. In Mexico he lost his squirrel; somebody mashed it to death accidentally, and St. Peter had a fearful fight with the poor man. A lady who took a fancy to Kildee, gave her a marmoset for the Saint. You know what a marmoset is? a queer little miniature monkey. Well, the creature loves St. Peter as the squirrel did, and he carries it in his bosom. It is there now asleep.”

Supper was brought in at this moment. The company eat in their room, not caring to make themselves common and to sate the curiosity the public might have as to the looks of the troupe—the ladies particularly. They supped early, too—before the regular tea-time, that they might go to the theater. Hazard had a cup of tea poured out for him by Lottie's little hands. He would go with them to the theater, he said, and would see a part of the performance—the scenes from Shakespeare—but at half past nine he must say good-bye, as his train left at a quarter to ten.

“That is such a pity,” the professor said. “You will not see Kildee in the ‘Knight's Temptation.’ Kildee's songs and dances always bring down the house.”

“And you should see her play the great lady,” said Mamma Duck. “It is amusing to see the dignified graces the little witch can put on. She seems to the manner born.”

Hazard thought it more than likely there was blue blood in the girl's veins, on one side at least, of her parentage. He wished he had asked Max something about her mother. Was she dead? Had they ever heard of her since she left the tenement house so abruptly nine years before?

Max had busied himself sending off the needed para-



phernalia to the hall, and had drunk his tea at a gulp. His usually joyous face was clouded. While they waited for the carriage, he took Lottie aside.

“Lottie,” he said, “I wish from my soul it was possible to get along without the ‘Knight’s Temptation’ this evening, or anything Kildee has to appear in.”

“Why, in wonder’s name?” asked Lottie.

“Because, you will call it imagination and me a fool, but I believe I saw Kildee’s mother this afternoon on the piazza of the other hotel. She was dressed very differently—neat and plain—and she looked a good deal older than when we knew her, and they called her a different name, but I do believe that it was no other than Mrs. Gonzalis. And just think, if she should see Kildee to-night, see how lovely and bright she is, she would be sure to claim her.”

“Oh! Max, that has always been your bugbear—that somebody would claim Kildee. Don’t cross bridges before you get to them. You have imagined before that you saw Mrs. Gonzalis. Let’s hope that it was not she, or that she will not recognize us. I don’t think she would know Kildee. And it is not likely she would want the girl. Why, if she was alive, has she never claimed her child before? Even if it is she, and she does lay claim to Kildee, she will have to establish that claim, and we can show that she deserted the child, and has made no sign all these years, and that she was an improper character. You remember how showily she dressed, and how she went out nights?”

“She had some business, she said; she was an agent for something. We couldn’t prove her to be an unfit person. She might explain the desertion; she might work on Kildee’s feelings and her sense of duty.”

“Hush with your mights and perhapses. ‘Cast that shadow from thy brow,’” sung Lottie, tapping him with her fan. “You broad-shouldered, brave fellow, you. You are a coward where Kildee is concerned. There’s the carriage. Come on.”



## CHAPTER XIII.

“DON’T tell me I am not the ideal Lady Macbeth,” Lottie said, coming out from the little improvised dressing-room into the space before the dropped curtain and sweeping a stage courtesy before Hazard. She was in all the stateliness of trailing purple velvet (cotton-back) and a tiara of (Irish) diamonds.

“I have been trying to drill my face into a granddame expression; have I succeeded? Do I impress you as the Lady of Macbeth Castle, coming forth to congratulate her lord on his accession of honors?”

She looked a deal more like a charming countess of the Louis XIV. period, Hazard thought, but he answered:

“So strongly do you impress me as the stately lady in question, that I must imagine myself Macbeth, and say with him,

“‘My dearest love, Malcolm comes here to-day.’”

He bowed his lips to Lottie’s hand with his finest grace.

“Well done,” cried Papa Duck, coming out of the other dressing-box as Macbeth in plumes and a general’s somewhat faded uniform. “I taught you that bow, you scamp. You ought to be with us now instead of following the dry business of scribbling. You’ve got genius — histrionic genius, sir. Lottie, you remember what a Hamlet he made? His face was a whole funeral procession of melancholy!”

“I remember his Romeo,” Lottie answered, stifling a sigh. He had played it to her Juliet once at an amateur performance, and it was an ever-fresh memory with her.

“We’ve got a noble house—I’ve just had a peep at it through a slit in the curtain,” exclaimed Frank. “But I



shall stall at those two long speeches of mine unless Kildee prompts. I can always understand when she prompts.”

“My dear Hall,” said the professor, “you had better go to the front and get a seat while you can. The seats are fast being taken. We shall have a fine house. There goes the music; St. Peter starts off vigorously.”

“I must say good-bye, as I shall have to leave here at ten. I hope to see you at Wallport soon,” Hazard said, extending his hand to the professor, who shook it heartily, saying:

“Our craft is too little for such big waters; however, we may come early in the fall.”

“I shall certainly look for you,” Hazard said, holding Lottie’s fingers in a lingering clasp.

Max was on the other side of the curtain in his musician’s seat just below the stage; and St. Peter was beside him. The audience forgot to be impatient for the curtain to rise, in wondering at Signor Petruchio’s music, and his strange appearance—his pallid face, his long white hair and beard, his big, pale, solemn eyes staring blankly forward as his bow moved over the strings with that wonderfully light, firm, keen touch which drew forth the inmost secrets of melody. Max was accompanying him on the violoncello. “The fine house” did not seem to have put him in spirits as it had the professor. He looked pale and anxious. He nodded to Hazard with a faint smile, and that astute youth saw that something was wrong.

“He is jealous because Kildee is to play with that handsome Frank,” thought Hazard; “or he is doubtful about her getting through all right. She looked such a mere child, dancing before that inspired idiot as she beat his eggs, that I can’t fancy her in the rôle of a court lady.”

But Hazard’s conjecture only grazed the mark. Max’s anxiety did refer to Kildee, but not in these ways. He had anxiously scanned the faces of all who entered the hall. He began to breathe freer as he saw nearly all the seats



appropriated; and he gave St. Peter the signal to begin by playing a few notes of the "Souvenirs de Bellini." He played on quite cheerfully, till suddenly he started and made a false note. While he had been attending to his instrument two vacant seats which had caught his eye previously had been occupied; the one by a handsome man, with full blonde beard, the other by the dark woman whom he had seen on the piazza of the hotel, and had believed to be Kildee's mother.

Max felt the blood forsake his face as she fixed her large black eyes upon him. Did she recognize him? Was it indeed she? She was changed, thin, hollow-eyed, but picturesque still. She no longer wore her hair in masses of jetty braids; it was put back with a plainness to correspond with her dress—of black silk with little trimming. But the shapely head, the finely turned neck were things that artist Max remembered. Then, who could forget her eyes! They had a wildness in them now, however, which had not belonged to them then.

"Yet it is, it must be she," he said to himself. "Can that be her husband with her? Has she married again? If she has, she may not care to claim Kildee. But no, she can not help wanting her. When she sees how sweet, how bright she is she will be sure to claim her. My hope is that she will not recognize her."

Kildee did not appear in the first part of the performance—the scenes from "Macbeth"—save in the banquet scene; where her part was merely dumb show; but when the guests rose from the table in amazement at Macbeth's strange behavior, Kildee's willowy form, leaned forward, with wide, surprised eyes and lips apart—made a conspicuous figure in the *tableau*. Max watched the pair who occupied the isolated seats. He saw the man lean forward and fix his opera-glass upon Kildee. The woman did the same, but she dropped her glass in a second and drew her shoulders together with what seemed a shudder. Her



companion bent down and spoke to her in an animated way. She responded. The curtain fell and a conversation ensued between these two, which seemed agitating to the woman. Max would have given much to know what it was about. Had he been able to overhear it, his suspicions would have been confirmed.

“The girl is really lovely,” Carleon said. “I thought so in that brief glimpse of her I had at the spring yesterday. It is not often nowadays that I care to have a second look at a woman’s face, but this one had something new in it. It was her laugh that caught my attention first. Such a fresh, merry little peal. She had given a cup of mineral water to that queer, daft-looking fiddler, and he had spilled it on his shirt bosom and looked at her helplessly. She laughed to reassure him, and then she wiped the water off with a little handkerchief she took from her neck, and patted his shoulder as much as to say, ‘you’re all right.’ Her face struck me as something new—the wide, brown, woodland eyes, the fresh rose of a mouth, and the sweet dignity of the brow and chin—made a novel combination. I had determined to see her again, even before you told me who she was. But are you sure, Zulimee, that this is the same girl—your daughter—so alleged?”

“Sure? Did you not see *his* eyes, the strong likeness to *him*? It is fearful!”

She shuddered again. He did not notice it, or at least paid no attention to it.

“A likeness may be accidental,” he said.

“It is not in this case. She is with the people who adopted her. I knew them; they occupied rooms in the tenement I lived in when I had the child with me. That fair young man took care of her when—”

“When you left her to starve—tender mother!” Carleon said, with his sarcastic smile.

“I did not mean she should starve. I meant to return to her. I told you that. I was miserable and desperate



enough not to care much what became of myself even, but I meant to creep back to the garret and the child when I had sold books enough to buy us food for another day. I had walked all the forenoon under the hot July sun; my head throbbed so I turned toward home—or that apology for home—when a sudden vertigo seized me. I fell down insensible, and was carried to the hospital afterward—but I have told you the story before. Believe it or not, as you please.”

He was not listening to her attentively. He seemed in a brown study. Presently he said:

“You will claim her now—will you not?”

“Claim her?” She gave vent to a little bitter laugh. “I could not be paid enough to make me stay where I could see her every day—with *that* face. Besides, what could I do with her, pray? I can not feed myself.”

“Make *her* feed you.”

“With her pitiful earnings as a *soubrette* in a small company of strolling players? Absurd!”

“She need not continue in that position. She could be more useful to you in—another way.”

“What way?”

He bent his head and pulled his tawny mustache a second, before he said with a sidelong look into her face, and that expression in his eyes which so often marred their violet beauty:

“Since when has beauty ceased to have its price?”

She reddened under her rouge, put on delicately now to accord with her appearance of quiet respectability.

“I understand you,” she said. “I deserve to have you think me that vile; but I tell you I would die before I would wrong that girl in the way you mean.”

There was a fierce energy in her low tones. He looked at her in surprise, then he said, with his sneer:

“Really! have we scruples?”

She bit her trembling lip. “You have a right to taunt



me," she said. "I have fallen low—low. My life is a record of miserable mistakes and sins and *crime*"—this last word in a husky voice—"but I repeat, I would starve to death before I would do such harm to that girl, who has *his* look and *his* blood in her veins."

"Yet you stole her out of revenge on him?"

"I did. It was a foolish and insane act. The temptation to do it seized me like the compelling hand of a devil. I did not wait to know certainly that it was his child. It was a year before I found out the mistake—too late then to restore her to her parents; they had gone to reside in a foreign land. I was neglectful, cruel sometimes to the little one. God forgive me, she had such a look of him! I will not do her any further hurt. She is innocent now; those are good people that have her in charge. I trust she may marry that young man who cared for her so kindly—boy though he was. He has a good face."

"A soft-looking nincompoop," Carleon said contemptuously, glowering at Max, who had just stopped playing, for the curtain was rising upon the closing piece, "The Knight's Temptation."

The opening scene showed a room in a palace, whose mistress, Kildee, in white silk and roses, had just avowed to her astonished relatives that she would not marry the withered grandee chosen for her, that she would wed a man of her own choice, let his station be what it might. She declared her intention of going out in the disguise of a peasant-girl, that she might find some one who would love her for herself alone. In the next scene she has carried her purpose into execution. She appears in the pretty, simple peasant dress, dancing with other peasants at the fair. Returning across the fields, she is encountered by the inevitable villain, and is rescued by the inevitable knight. He offers her the homage of his heart. She loves him, but wishes to put his affection to the test, and so sends him on a mission into the Black Forest and contrives that he is



beset, overpowered, and left bound; is found by her attendants and herself, now in her own garb as countess and further disguised by differently colored hair, and conveyed to her palace, where he receives distinguished attentions and is entertained with music and feasted with wines and fruits.

The countess—so grand in her rich dress and jewels that he does not suspect that she is the lovely mistress of his heart—puts forth every art to win him for herself. She is by turns tender and proud, wild and melting. She comes out presently in a ravishing gossamer dress that reveals her lovely limbs, and dances before him—first merrily, scattering flowers and perfumes; then dreamily, voluptuously, winding and unwinding about her a silken, silvery scarf, as the music winds and unwinds its alluring melodies. Again, she reclines on a divan at his feet—in soft, flowing draperies, and sings for him, as she touches a little lute, sweet, impassioned songs that take his senses prisoner. Then she offers him her love, her wealth, herself. His heart seems bursting with the struggle against temptation; but he resists. His answer is: “Beautiful enchantress, my heart is not my own. You are strangely like my love, but you are not she. I could love you if I had not given myself to her. But I am hers only.”

Then the countess laughs, tears off the golden hair, and holds out her lovely arms, saying: “I am Annetta. The test is ended. I am yours.”

The little piece in three short acts, was not much as a drama, but it was made charming by the fresh grace and naturalness of Kildee’s acting—her sweet voice, her exquisite dancing. Carleon followed her movements with gloating eyes. When the curtain fell on the last act but one, he turned to Mrs. Gonzalis and said:

“You must claim that girl, and take her to Aphrodite Island.”

“Never,” was her answer.



“As you please; but listen to me. Upon your doing as I desire depends your future living. I will not give you another cent else; and how will you live?”

“I can die. I can stop this fever of living by my own hand.”

“But you won’t do that, my friend; you are too cowardly; too afraid of the bugbears your Mexican priests and grannies taught you to believe lie in wait for the sinful soul beyond the shadow of death. No, you won’t kill yourself; you will live on—but how?”

She made no answer, and he went on:

“When you came to me a few weeks ago, you told me you had been living on the money I sent you, and that this was now gone. I gave you more, that you might play your cards boldly and entrap some old duffer into matrimony. When I came here to-day to attend this meeting, I found you installed in a fashionable hotel, a quiet, respectable widow, reputed rich. You had been at the watering-place a month, and had played your fly admirably, I have no doubt, but *cui bono*? No fish had risen to the bait. And your money is all gone. Don’t look to me for more. I will not help you, unless you are willing to help me. You know I mean what I say. I can be as hard as steel when I please.”

“I know that too well.”

“But I have not been hard to you—on the whole. Men would say I had done all that honor required. And now, you must find some other resource. You can not work; you have neither energy nor strength for it. You are indolent and luxurious, and, moreover, you are the slave of a habit. You confessed it to me. You owned that it was living death to be deprived of your daily allowance of opium and brandy. And these cost money—how will you get it? The time is past when you might coin it by smiling on us fools of men. Your youth and beauty are gone; they have dropped from you suddenly, strangely, in the



past eighteen months; I never saw a woman change so in so short a time. When you dropped in upon me so unexpectedly a few weeks ago, I thought you the ghost of your former self—there was a haggard aspect in your face—a wild, haunted look in your eyes that might make one suspect you were suffering remorse for some—crime.”

His blue eyes were like points of steel. They fixed themselves pitilessly on the woman. She turned ghastly under them; a writhing shudder passed over her as though she were stabbed at some vital point.

“Crime!” she uttered, trying to sneer. “You are wild; you are simply seeking to torture me into doing as you desire.”

“I am simply trying to make you feel that you are in my power, and that it is possible for me to punish you for your obstinate ingratitude in refusing to do what I ask. Now, let me show you the other side. Claim the girl, and take her with you to Aphrodite Island, and you are sure of a support for life. I will give you a home in one of the island cottages, or I will settle an annuity upon you, and you can go where you please.”

“And the girl?”

“Never mind the girl; leave her to me.”

“She had better be left to the mercy of a beast of prey.”

“How do you know that? What assurance have you that I do not intend to marry her? She is lovely enough to tempt a man into such folly. I have thought seriously of trying the rôle of respectable *pater familias*. I have tried everything else—and tired of it.”

“You have thought of marrying?”

“I have. I am growing middle-aged, as I don’t mind confessing to you. I am sick of the sort of women I associate with—a miserable, mercenary set, ready to gobble your money and play you false when they have a chance. It has occurred to me that it would be a pleasant change



to win the love of a pure woman in a fair way and marry her at the altar, in the orthodox fashion—bridal-veil and wedding-march and priestly blessing, and all that. I have thought I should like to have a child to bear my name and fall heir to my money. Yes, I *have* thought of marrying; but where to find a wife? There is not a woman in my circle I would call by that title; and the fair prudes outside of it have been taught to shun me, as a sort of moral leper, whose look is poison. This girl has never heard of me. She would not be afraid of me; I could make her love me—you know that. She is honest; she is sweet and refined. She would grace any man's home. She has variety, too, which is better than beauty. More than all, she has the best blood in the State in her veins. I am too experienced in stock not to look to pedigree. And if I married her—if, mind—I would have her pedigree proved out; I would let it be known whose child she was. You say you can produce the proofs; I would have you do this, and I would stand between you and prosecution. With the aid of her family and my money and a little diplomacy, I could enter the ranks of respectability and become a shining moral light—eh?"

"One never knows whether you are in jest or mockery. So you wish to marry this girl?"

"I did not say so; I make no promises; but there is a chance that I may."

"She deserves a better fate, but this is not so bad as the other."

"Bad? Is it not an old saying that a reformed *roué* makes the best husband? I may make a model Benedict, who can tell?"

"You will tire of her in a month."

"Possibly. 'One grows tired of everything,' says your favorite Balzac. But when a woman has my name, she is part of myself. My own selfishness insures her good treatment. She should have all she wanted; and if I neglected



her personally, I should never mistreat her. I am too proud for that—and too lazy”—smiling languidly. “Say, is it a bargain? Will you claim the girl? Think over the alternative. Be quiet. The curtain will rise in a moment.”

She hesitated; her breast heaving, her fingers nervously locking and interlocking together. He leaned back and watched her under his half-dropped, curling lashes.

“You will be wanting money this very night for a fresh supply of opium,” he said.

She gave him a dagger look, but in the next breath she said, in a husky whisper:

“I will do it.”

“Thanks. I thought you were a sensible woman. You must put in your claim at once—to-night. They leave to-morrow.”

“But if they refuse to give her up?”

“You shall back your demand with money—offer to pay those people for her board, etc. The old chap may refuse at first, but he’ll think better of it. He has his flock of Ducks to keep up, and itinerant play-acting isn’t a lucrative business, by long odds.”

“She will not be willing to come to me.”

“Naturally; you deserted her, remember. You must explain that, and talk of duty, and your yearning heart, and call up your pocket-handkerchief. You told me once you possessed the capacity to be a good actress. Show that gift to-night. The girl is young and tender-hearted, and will not doubt you.”

“Oh! what a shame to deceive her,” Zulimee said in a passionate whisper. “But we will not deceive that young musician so easily,” she went on, after a pause. “And he will not take your money. He will require proofs that the girl is my child, and—that I am a proper person to take charge of her.”

“Then I will bring testimony forward to prove it.”



“Whose? Yours?”

“No; I will not come forward at all in the matter. I do not wish to be known in it. It must not be known that she goes to the island.”

“Then how will you get the testimony?”

“As everything can be got—by paying for it. There is a man who will testify anything I wish. And he has a well-known character for respectability and morality. He is my paid tool and agent—secretly. Openly he holds me up as a warning and takes me as a text on depravity. He is here now—not in this hall—he is too pious to go to a play; but he came to Rock Springs on a little business of mine, and he has gone to a prayer-meeting to-night. I’ll see him, and he will make it all smooth for you in the way of reference. You can say that a well-known and highly respectable gentleman is here, who can bear testimony to your character and fitness to take charge of your child. There goes the curtain at last!”

They had talked without danger of being overheard. They occupied two chairs—a little distance from the other seats—and the musicians had played continuously. Yet Max had not ceased to watch the dark lady and her blonde companion. He had noted the earnestness of their talk and the agitating effect it had seemed to have upon the woman. Above all, he had noticed how intently they had looked at Kildee.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

THE curtain fell at last. Tired Kildee repaired to the little dressing-room and began hurriedly to divest herself of her stage finery preparatory to resuming the little gray frock. There was a knock; a call—“Kildee!” She opened the door to encounter Max’s pale face, which he vainly strove to make calm.



“What is it, Max? Did I not please you in the play?” she asked, anxiously.

He took the hand she laid on his arm.

“Please me, dear; you always please me,” he said, smiling, but his tones were unsteady; and Kildee was not reassured.

“But I must tell you,” Max went on, hurriedly. “I am apprehensive of something; I can not tell you what it is now; it may amount to nothing. But I want you to be ready to go with me on the Western express which leaves at twelve to-night. Yes, I know we were to stay here until after the *matinée* to-morrow, but circumstances seem to make it best that you should go to-night. The others can follow whenever they please. It is nearly twelve now. Put on your hat and linen ulster; leave your clothes for Lottie to pack up and bring. Don’t ask me any questions. You can trust me, can’t you?”

“Yes, Max,” she said, with a wondering, wistful look, and he closed the door while she finished buttoning her *basque* with hurried, trembling fingers.

Mrs. Duck and Lottie standing outside, had heard a part of what Max had said to Kildee. He turned to Lottie:

“It is as I feared,” he said. “It is Mrs. Gonzalis. She is here to-night with a fashionably dressed *roué*-looking man. She recognized Kildee, I am sure, and the two watched her through their opera-glasses. Then they talked earnestly together. I am persuaded she will claim Kildee. I want to get away with her to-night. It may be that Mrs. Gonzalis will not take the trouble to follow her. But I feel miserably apprehensive that— Good God! here she is,” he broke off, in an agitated under-tone, for at that instant the professor came up, and with him was the lady in black—Kildee’s reputed mother. The professor’s usually ruddy face was quite pale; he stammered as he said:

“My dear, this is Mrs. Gonzalis—Kildee’s mother.”

Mrs. Duck folded her fat arms on her matronly breast, and looked beyond the lady’s proffered hand.



“Is it possible Kildee has a mother? We have heard of none these nine years,” she said, with her finest queen-dowager air.

“Kildee has no mother except ourselves,” cried Lottie. “The person who mistreated her when a child, and deserted her, was not her mother, else she would not have left her and made no attempt to find out whether she were dead or alive during all this time.”

“I will explain this when my daughter comes—where is she?”

The door of the dressing-room opened, and Kildee appeared, equipped for traveling.

Mrs. Gonzalis approached her half timidly.

“My child,” she said, appealingly, “my long-lost darling, do you not remember your mother?”

Kildee fell back in amazement.

“You have forgotten me, but I would remember you anywhere. My child, I have sought so long my Jasmina.”

The slender silken arms were around her. Kildee suffered the embrace, but extricated herself from it the next instant and looked around at the troubled, indignant faces of her friends, and then at the woman who claimed her—the regular but haggard features, the hollow, splendid eyes. There was a look in the eyes that somehow made her shrink. She turned to Max. He answered the appealing look by coming to her side and drawing her to him. He faced Mrs. Gonzalis.

“I deny your right to claim this girl,” he said. “I can prove your desertion of her nine years ago. I found her tied in your room, half dead with fright and hunger. You have put in no claim for her; you have made no sign in all these years, and now, when you have seen her and imagine that her talents or her beauty may be of advantage to you, you come forward and demand that she leave those who have been parents, sisters, and brothers to her, and go with



you, a stranger, and less. No; you shall not take her away. She will not leave us."

"No; I will not leave them—I will not leave them," Kildee says, clinging to Max's arm and looking resolutely into the dark eyes that search hers. "They are more to me than you can be. But for them I would have died. They took care of me when you forsook me."

"I did not forsake you, my child," Mrs. Gonzalis said, laying her slim hand upon Kildee's arm and bringing those strange, magnetic eyes to bear upon her. "I did not forsake you. Listen to me, my daughter, and you, good people, who have so much misjudged me; listen to the story of my life since I went out from the lodging-house that burning day to sell books as usual that I might get food for myself and this child. As I walked the blazing streets a sunbeam pierced my brain, and I fell insensible. I was carried to the hospital and there lay for many weeks at death's door through inflammation of the brain. After the fever left me, my mind was disordered; the past rose before me like a procession of dim shadows. I was sent to an asylum for the deranged; there I remained six years. When I was pronounced cured and allowed to go beyond the walls, I went straight to St. Louis, and to the old lodging-house where I had left my child. I learned that she had been adopted by you and your wife, Mr. Duck, having first been kindly cared for by this young man. But you had gone away some months before—no one could tell me where. I inserted an advertisement or two, but I had no money to prosecute the search for my child. I struggled on, the hope of seeing her growing fainter in my heart. At last came a relief from the grinding curse of poverty. The legacy of a relative placed me above want, and now, a few months later, there comes the still happier fortune—I find my child. Now I can give her a home and the advantages of leisure and instruction. I do not forget, kind friends of the child, that my gain is loss to you. I deeply



regret that I must take her from you. I shall always be profoundly grateful for your kindness; and I beg you will permit me to show my gratitude in another way than words. Kindness such as yours can never be repaid with mere money, but I hope, Professor Duck, that you and your wife will not pain me by refusing a little testimonial of this kind from me. It is meant only as an expression of my thanks for what you have done for my child. This purse contains notes to the amount of a thousand dollars. I regret that it is not more, but it shall be added to at some future day."

"We won't take pay for Kildee. We won't give her up," cried Lottie, passionately.

"Papa, you can not hesitate. Refuse the money—refuse to give up Kildee. Nobody has a right to her but us," said Frank.

But the professor did hesitate. Various considerations caused him to waver. At length he said:

"Keep your gift for the present, Madame Gonzalis. Tomorrow we can discuss the matter more coolly."

"But I wish to take my child with me. I can not bear to lose sight of her now, even for a night. Jessa, my love, will you not come with me? Will you not come to the mother who has yearned for you so long and so sadly?"

She held out her arms to Kildee; the persuasive voice and eyes thrilled the girl, but she clung to Max.

"Oh, my child, can it be that you will not believe in me, that you will not acknowledge me, that you draw back from the arms that have so long ached to clasp you? Ah, this is hard—hard."

She covered her face with her hands and sobbed aloud. Kildee stood irresolute, her mouth trembling. She made a movement toward her newly found mother, but Max drew her back.

"Madame," he said to Mrs. Gonzalis, "who will vouch for you that you are this girl's sweet mother?"



She changed color under his searching eyes, but she answered promptly:

“There are several of the best people in Wallport who will testify that I am her mother. I will give you their names, and you can write and satisfy yourself. Or, stay—there is no need of this. There is a gentleman now in this place whose word will be all-sufficient. You know, or you have heard of, Mr. Joel Gibson, of Wallport. He is well-known here as a reliable business man, respected citizen, and a prominent church member. I will bring him to you—now, to-night.”

“Bring him to-morrow, madame—mother—let me stay with my friends to-night,” pleaded the trembling girl.

“Yes, to-morrow must do,” interposed the professor. “The child must not go from us now. She is greatly agitated. She must rest and be with those she loves to-night.”

“With those she loves?” repeated Mrs. Gonzalis, bitterly; “oh, my child, my own—how cruel those words are! But you *will* learn to love me. You will—you must. You will go with me? Promise this, my daughter!”

She approached Kildee; she held out her arms entreatingly.

“Let your kiss be your promise,” she said, drawing the girl to her.

Kildee felt those silken arms clasp her shrinking form. She shuddered with a dim feeling of serpent coils; but she had suffered the feverish lips to press her fresh young mouth, and she heard with a strange, dizzy, fascinated sensation the words, like a soft hiss:

“You have promised.”



## CHAPTER XV.

NEVER had Carleon's confidential *factotum*—Joel Gibson—looked more like a reverend clergyman or a benignant philanthropist than when he beamed blandly upon the manager of the Ducciole Troupe next morning, standing beside that lady-like person, Mrs. Gonzalis, testifying to his worthy friend's many virtues and severe trials, and ending with thanks to a kind Providence which had at last rewarded this long-suffering lady by permitting her to be restored to her anxiously sought daughter.

The simple-hearted manager was deeply impressed by the bald head, the gold eyeglasses and the reverend aspect of Mrs. Gonzalis's "voucher." He was profoundly touched by the rehearsal of that lady's trials, her angelic fortitude and maternal devotion. Mr. Joel Gibson was a persuasive talker. He had been a clergyman once; why he was not now was known to nobody in Wallport but Miles Carleon. There he passed as a general advertising agent, with an office in one of Carleon's buildings. He was a member of several Christian societies, and sustained a respectable reputation, which did not hinder him from being secretly useful to Carleon, the speculator and profligate, in various ways.

The Ducks were convinced of Mrs. Gonzalis's rightful claim to Kildee. It needed not Mr. Gibson's gentle reminder that the law would sustain the lady's claim.

"Ah, yes; it is all right," the kind-hearted manager sighed, turning round to Max. "The dear child must go. After all, it will be to her advantage. She will have a settled home, with no need to work for her livelihood, though she might have become a star in our glorious profession."



“She shall not go unless by her own wish,” returned Max, doggedly.

“It *is* by her own wish,” said Mrs. Gonzalis, sweetly. “You heard her declare it last evening. She has not changed her mind—have you, my love?”

“No,” uttered the pale Kildee, who had wept herself to sleep in Lottie’s arms.

Mrs. Gonzalis felt the necessity of conciliating Max. This sturdy, downright young man, with the clear, blue eyes that looked through you, was to be dreaded.

“I know how deeply my little girl is indebted to you, Mr. Rubin,” she said, earnestly. “I thank you from my heart for your kindness to her. You have refused any compensation for the care you took of Jasmina; but will you not accept this little gift as a token of my gratitude?”

She touched the spring of a small morocco case; an elegant watch and chain lay on the purple velvet lining. She held out the gift to Max with her persuasive smile. He would not touch it.

“No,” he said, “Kildee is indebted to me for nothing.”

“Ah, incorrigible!” said the lady, shaking her head. “Then I can only show you my good will by inviting you and your friends to come and see Kildee whenever you can. For the present, my home is at Wallport. There is my address.”

She handed Max a card on which she had written the number of the house she had boarded at a few days before she went to Rock Springs. She had not the least intention of returning to this address.

“And now, my love,” she said to Kildee, “let me help you with your packing. We leave on the eleven o’clock train.”

“So soon!” cried Kildee, starting. Once more she looked eagerly in the face of her mother. What was there in that face—faded, but handsome still—



which made her inwardly shiver with vague dislike and foreboding?

Max saw her pale, half-terrified look.

"I am going with you," he said reassuringly. Mrs. Gonzalis overheard the words: a frown darkened her face.

"That will never do," she said to herself. A few minutes later, upon the pretext of getting a breath of cool air, she went out upon a side gallery where Carleon was sitting. Stopping near him, and bending down as though to inhale the fragrance of a heliotrope plant, she said:

"You will have no end of trouble with that fellow, Rubin. He is wild about the girl. He will follow her and find out where she is taken to. He is going with her to Wallport this morning."

"The devil he is!" returned Carleon, looking black. He chewed the end of his cigar thoughtfully.

"He'll not go," he said presently. "I'll find a way to keep him."

Standing by the breezy window in the smoking-room, Max was looking out on the white, lazily drifting clouds and thinking of Kildee's future. Carleon came up and accosted him in his graceful, genial way and begged leave to introduce himself that he might make an inquiry.

"I learned from your conversation yesterday," he said, "that you are an artist, and have lately made a sketching tour through the South-west; have you any sketches with you of the scenery of that region?"

"Quite a number in white and black and water-colors," Max said.

"I would like to see them and buy them if you care to part with them. I am making up a portfolio of sketches of American scenery, and have every section represented but the South-west."

Max was woefully in need of money, and would have welcomed this proposition had it come earlier.

"I would be delighted to show you the sketches, Mr.



Carleon," he said; "but I fear I haven't time. I am to leave on the eleven o'clock train."

"Why, you have half an hour—plenty of time—and the hotel is right at the station. Bring your drawings up to my room. It's the coolest in the house—No. 15, end room. I'll go up and open the shutters."

He did more than open the shutters. He went up to a little clock that ticked on the mantel-piece and put its hands back five minutes. Then he took out a bottle of fine sherry and two little crystal cups from his portmanteau, and was ready for his visitor, who entered with a well-filled portfolio.

Max thought him the most charming gentleman he had ever met—so cordial, so delicately flattering, so delightfully entertaining, full of reminiscences of art wonders in the Old World. But he did not forget to glance often at the clock. Carleon had pointed to it, saying:

"There, you have railroad time right before your eyes; no danger of getting left."

Max found him a liberal as well as appreciative patron. He bought the sketches, giving a good deal more than Max had asked for them. The young artist transferred the roll of bills to his pocket-book in a glow of honest pleasure, with no dream of treachery. He then hurriedly packed his portfolio.

"Don't get out of breath; you have five minutes yet," said Carleon, laughing and holding out his hand. He gave Max a hearty shake of the hand and a cordial invitation to visit him at his suite of hotel rooms in Wallport. He repeated his offer to assist the young artist in finding patrons if he would establish a studio in Wallport. He ended by pressing him to take a parting glass of wine. Max declined the wine, snatched up his portfolio and hurried from the room.

Scarcely was he outside the door when he heard the signal whistle of the departing train. He rushed out, un-



mindful of luggage or duster, but, as he ran breathless to the station, the train glided away before his eyes.

Mme. Gonzalis was looking from a window of the car. He fancied that her face wore a malicious smile.

“Curse the clock!” he muttered in his disappointment; but he had no suspicion of Carleon’s intervention.

There would be no train till late this afternoon; he must wait until then. Meantime he would telegraph Hazard to be at the depot when the train arrived and keep an eye upon Kildee. He sent the message at once, and felt somewhat comforted. Hazard would see Kildee installed in her new home. He did not know how preoccupied the young reporter was, nor what schemes were busy shaping themselves in his brain.

Max reached Wallport in the night, and the next day he called at the address Kildee’s mother had given him—110 Palmetto Street. The servant who came to the door said Mrs. Gonzalis had gone away; she no longer boarded there. Then she asked:

“Might your name be Rubin?”

Max said it was.

“There is a note here for you, then. She sent it here to be given to you if you should call.”

Max was too eager to see the note to remark the singularity of Mrs. Gonzalis having sent the note to the address she had given him. He tore open the perfumed envelope and read:

“MY DEAR MR. RUBIN,—I find that my rooms here have been appropriated during my absence, and, as Jasmina seems drooping this hot weather, I have concluded to take her a little trip northward. She sends love, and says she will be delighted to see you when we return. In the meantime she will write.”

Max hurried to the office of the “Rattler” to interview his friend.

“Did you get my telegram? Did you meet Kildee at



the train?" he asked, while Hazard was shaking him by the hand.

"Old fellow, you'll have to forgive me. I got the message, and meant surely to go, but was deucedly busy, and forgot it—let the time slip by. I'm sorry, but I dare say it made no matter. They got home all right. I went to the depot half an hour after the time, and made inquiry about them. The police officer there told me a lady and girl, unattended, had been met by a carriage and driven off up town. Haven't you their address?"

"Mrs. Gonzalis gave me the address of the boarding-house she said she would stop at for the present. I went there and found only a note, saying she had concluded to take her daughter off on a little summer trip."

"Oh, well, that's natural enough. They'll be back in a little while, or they'll write, and you can join them. Cheer up, and come with me for a walk. It's all right." But Max felt it was not all right. A suspicion of foul play had entered his mind. He was filled with misgivings concerning the child of his boyish care, the love of his riper years. Could he have known that she was an inmate of the isolated and voluptuous mansion on Aphrodite Island!

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## CHAPTER XVI.

No wonder that young Hall had no time and little sympathy to bestow on his friend, Max, in his distress at the loss of Kildee. Hazard was too full of plans and anxieties of his own. Three schemes seethed in his busy brain; to win Honor Montcalm; to trace the murderer of her uncle, and to bring about the nomination and election of her father, thereby securing future political influence to forward his own advancement. These were the ends which he determined to compass. Their accomplishment would have seemed an absurd dream to a less daring and sanguine spirit.



Strangely enough, the plans hung together by a chain of subtle sequence—the success of one depended upon the success of the other. If he could succeed in breaking off the engagement between Honor and Heathcliff, then General Montcalm would feel free to declare himself a candidate for the office he would be likely to win. Could he sift the murder of Captain Montcalm to the bottom and prove that the Mayor of Wallport was mixed up with it, then the connection between Heathcliff and Miss Montcalm would be at once disrupted, and his rival in love and opposer in politics would be driven from either field.

But how dared he dream that the upright and honored Ira Heathcliff had any connection with that bloody drama—that this man who was president of various humane and Christian associations was the harborer of a murderess! He had no ground for suspicion beyond the declaration of the workman that he had seen Laura Montcalm enter the mayor's premises on the night of the murder—this, taken in connection with that mysterious note which he—Hazard—had read upon the mayor's desk, and the writer of which he believed to be a secret inmate of the Red House—the abode of the mayor's deformed client.

Yes, there was a woman secreted there. It was her voice he had heard singing: it was her graceful shape he had seen through the window, it was more than possible that this was Laura Montcalm—the woman upon whose head so large a price had been set and for whom the police had searched in vain.

With his brain at fever heat, Hazard hurried through his office work each day that he might haunt the neighborhood of the Red House. Once or twice he heard a note of the same sweet voice, but he saw no one to match the voice. Indeed the position of the house baffled his efforts to see even its exterior, or what was going on in the grounds about it.

He resorted to stratagem to effect an entrance into the



guarded precincts. Finding that he could not bribe the vigilant negro watch-dog, he tried to obtain admission under various disguises and pretexts. He got himself up as a lace peddler, a piano-tuner, a beggar in great distress, an old woman fortune-teller who had something of great importance to communicate. But none of these artful dodges moved the Cerberus to break his mistress's orders. He met every appeal with the same shake of his iron-gray head and the reply: "Missis don't see no company."

At last Hazard resolved to storm the citadel more boldly.

He buttoned a double-breasted, long-tailed coat over two others which he had on, in order to make his dimensions more imposing, donned a high silk hat, a pair of huge whiskers, gold eyeglasses, and a great watch-chain and seal-ring, and, further equipped with a big blank-book under his arm and a gold-headed cane, he rang the gate-bell of the Red House.

When the old negro appeared he cut short the functionary's usual formula by curtly demanding admission as an officer of the State—a taker of the census. The pompous air, the big watch-chain, and the bold command carried the point. The gate swung back, and Hazard presently found himself in the dim, musty-smelling, never-used parlor of the Red House.

It was some time before the mistress of the house appeared. She came in at last with a slow, uncertain step, and, just bending her head, sunk into a chair near the door. It was evident that she was painfully sensitive about her deformity. She wore the veil of dark gauze fastened behind over her plentiful gray hair; but Hazard could see through it the purple mark disfiguring one side of her face and a portion of her neck, giving her a strangely repulsive look. Aside from this disfigurement, her hooked nose and wrinkled cheeks were not pleasant to look upon. She wore blue goggles over eyes whose lids had a trick of twitching and drawing together, which might be owing to



nervous shyness or to near-sightedness. Her manner was fluttered and timid, yet not devoid of a certain dignity and refinement. She directed a penetrating look at Hazard from her queer, contracted eyes behind the blue goggles, and he felt himself coloring under his sham whiskers; but his native assurance came to his aid, and he bowed to her in a briskly dignified official way, and informed her that he was engaged in estimating the population of the city and had called upon her in that capacity. Then, opening his great blank-book with a flourish and poising his pencil, he put to her the customary questions of the census-taker—as her name, age, place of birth, and finally the number of persons in her family. As he put the last question he kept a searching eye fixed upon her. She replied:

“The other persons on the premises beside myself are two negro servants—a man and woman named—”

“The white inmates of your house first, if you please,” interrupted Hazard. “I should prefer to see them. Indeed, it is my duty to put the questions direct to all adult persons.”

“There is *no* white inmate of the house besides myself.”

“No member of your family, perhaps, but there is some other occupant—a visitor, or—”

“No, sir, there is no one. I live alone.”

“Is it so? Pardon me, but I must be exact—it is my business to be; and these questions—I need not inform a lady of your intelligence—must be answered as on oath. Do I then understand you to say that there is not, and has not lately been, any white person beside yourself living on these premises?”

“It is what I said, sir, and what I repeat,” returned the lady, haughtily. She rose as though to end the interview; her crooked figure seemed almost to straighten, and her drawn eyes emitted an indignant flash upon the intruder.

“If you wish to see the two negroes, I will send them to



you in the yard," she said, dismissing him with a wave of her small, black-mittened hand.

Chagrined and disappointed, Hazard yet determined to carry his stratagem as far as he could. He might gain something by interrogating the negroes. But when he had them before him as he sat on a rustic bench under one of the trees, he found that his cross-questioning failed to elicit anything but what he had heard from the mistress herself. The negro woman, a tidy, middle-aged person—had been with Miss Faust nearly two years; the man had been her factotum at the Red House ever since she had been in Wallport—"Seven years, come next Christmas," he said. It was an easy place, only he wished "folks would quit worriting his mistress. She didn't want people to come staring at her misformities. I never stares at her myself. She told me from de fust it hurt her feelin's, and I'se took care not to look her hard in the face ever since; I jest glances at her sidelike."

The pretended census-taker departed but little wiser than when he came. Still, all he had heard had not done away with his presistent belief that there was a secret inmate of the house. Through all Miss Faust's haughty decision, he had, as he thought, detected a certain perturbation, and hesitancy that seemed to argue there was something wrong.

But what step should he take next? There was the vacant building on the lot adjoining the Red House—the same into the yard of which he had made his way that night, and climbing into a fork of a tree had seen the lady's shape through the window. This building was still "to let," as he saw by the green card upon the door. The idea came to him, as by a flash, to rent the house for awhile and make it the base of his detective operations. An end window near the back of the building would afford a view of the window in the Red House through which Hazard had seen the graceful vision.

He went at once to the real estate agent whose name was



on the card and rented the old out-of-repair house for two months. He did not, however, remove the sign "to let," nor did he occupy the building, only to slip in at odd times during the day and night, and make his way to the side window of the rear room, there to keep watch through the blinds upon the movements of the occupants of the mysterious house.

For awhile nothing rewarded his labors. Occasionally the blinds of the one window not hidden from him by intervening trees were thrown open, and he had a view of a pretty interior—evidently a boudoir or private sitting-room, with a background of pale tinted wall, relieved by pictures, flowers and a swinging bird's cage of silver wire. Several times he had seen Miss Faust seated by the table reading, or standing beside the cage, feeding her birds. Only once had he seen her without the veil. Then she was evidently alone. As old Caleb had said, she shrunk from fully exposing her disfigured face even to her servants.

But it was not the deformed old recluse that Hazard watched for with such stealthy intentness. And as yet no form but her misshapen one and the rotund figure of her dusky maid, had appeared within the space framed by the long French window. Hazard's hope was beginning to falter, but he did not relax his vigilance—rather he increased it. And at last his patient watching was crowned with something akin to success. One evening just at dusk, he saw the mayor enter the gate of the Red House. Hazard had followed Heathcliff at a little distance and seen him stop first at a book-store where he bought a new magazine, and then at a pretty stall, lighted with Chinese lanterns, where he purchased a basket of grapes arranged with their own fresh leaves. With the basket in his hand and the magazine in his coat-pocket, he mounted the stone steps of the terrace and unlocked the gate with a key he took from his pocket. No sooner was he inside the inclosure than Hazard hastened around the corner and made his way to



the old house he had rented. Going round to the back entrance, he exchanged his boots for carpet slippers (a precaution he always took), and entered the dark empty house. He would light no lamp lest he should put the inmates of the Red House on their guard.

Arrived at his post of observation, he saw to his chagrin that the blinds of the window were closed. But another look showed him that the slats were turned so as to admit the air, and this allowed him a partial view of any object that might come within the lighted parallelogram.

The evening was so still that the slightest noise made itself heard. He caught the sound of a rap on the boudoir door, and immediately a figure passed across the lighted space, as though coming from an adjoining room. It passed with a swift, gliding motion, but, in spite of the intervening slats, he saw that it was the same shapely, flexile form he had seen before. In another moment two figures were partially seen behind the turned blind. One seemed the mayor's stately, erect form; the other was the slender shape which had crossed the room. She seemed to bend and hold out her hands as though to receive something—doubtless the basket of grapes. Then she lifted her head; the tall figure stooped, and Hazard could almost have sworn that a kiss had been given and received.

They moved away from the window and Hazard saw them no more together. But an hour later, he saw the female figure again cross the space behind the turned blinds, and said to himself:

“She has gone to her bed-chamber.”

Hurrying out of the house, Hazard reached the corner of the street in time to see the mayor's unmistakable figure pass a gas-lamp some distance up the street.

Next day Hazard said to General Montcalm:

“Have you found that picture of your brother's wife?”

“What, the miniature painted on ivory? No, the house-keeper has been looking for it. She picked it up when I



threw it out of the window, and put it somewhere among her effects. I never thought of its being useful to trace her. I only wanted to put the face of the cursed traitress and murderess out of my sight.”

“Had she golden-brown hair?”

“Yes, and plenty of it. It was one of her most marked features. Why do you ask? Have you found any one you think may be she?”

“I have found a—claw,” said Hazard, slowly, bending once more over the article he was copying from one of the general’s old files of political papers. “A rather important claw, I hope,” he added, after a pause; “but the time is not yet ripe to disclose it. General, this old letter of Norton’s will tell heavy against him. He’s forgotten he ever uttered such rash sentiments. Their republication will be a startling torpedo in his path. We have a bomb preparing for Heathcliff, too. We are clearing the field for our independent candidate. It is time he entered the lists. When shall the ‘Rattler’ announce you, general?”

“Why, I supposed I had made it perfectly clear to your people that it was out of the question for me to run when Heathcliff—”

“Was your prospective son-in-law. Yes, I know you urged that objection, but you also said that if the engagement were broken up—”

“But the engagement will not be broken up. They are to be married in a few weeks. It is fixed as fate, you understand.”

“Yes, I understand,” Hazard repeated. But he smiled to himself as he thrust his note-book into his coat-pocket and lighted the cigar the general had just offered him. He did *not* understand that this marriage was something as sure as fate. As the smoke curled up in graceful wreaths he watched it dreamily and built upon it a prophetic vision of Honor Montcalm, smiling and holding out to him wreaths wherewith to crown his victorious brow.



## CHAPTER XVII.

THE setting sun, bursting out below a black band of cloud that barred the west, lighted up Aphrodite Island with lurid illumination. Standing in the glare on the sandy shore was a solitary girl's figure—Kildee—looking out wistfully across the waves to the mainland, to the roofs and steeples of the town. White-winged sloops sailed in the distance, outlined against the lurid sky. A steamer, outward bound, swept by, trailing her smoke-wreath. More than once a wild impulse came over Kildee to signal one of these vessels and beg to be carried away—anywhere. But what could she do? Her friends had gone to a distance, and they had never written to her. Max had not written; he had not told her good-bye, even.

“He is angry with me because I came with my mother, and has cast me off,” thought Kildee, sorrowfully.

Lottie had told her to send letters to them at New Orleans, and she had written to her and to Max time and again, giving her letters to the solemn, taciturn Russian, who, with his wife, were the only servants at Aphrodite, and who went to Wallport for the marketing, rowing himself in the little boat that was kept at the island. She could not know that these letters were never mailed; that they were brought back to Mme. Gonzalis, who took them from her pocket at night and burned them leisurely and dreamily at her lamp; Lottie's fervent little letters to her “darling Kildee” met the same fate.

Max did not write, because he had been deceived by Mme. Gonzalis into believing that she had taken Kildee away for her health.

Wistfully Kildee looked out over the sea—a bewildered



pain and longing at her young heart. She was too inexperienced to comprehend the situation in which she found herself; or to know what to do; but she felt instinctively that it was not good for her to be on Aphrodite Island. Every sunset she walked to the sea-shore, and looked, as now, over the expanse of heaving sea and around at the tiny island that began to seem a cage. When she had seen it first in the glamour of a rosy sunset, it had seemed a little paradise; it was after the serpent had left its trail. The flower-beds were weed-grown; the shrubbery was growing rank; weeds choked the fountains and grew about the naked marble nymphs that guarded them.

A subtly sensuous spirit pervaded the house inside. The rooms, for all their luxurious furnishing, had an air of disorderly abandonment. The pictures on the drawing-room walls betrayed the trail of the serpent. They mostly illustrated mythological fables, and all the symmetry of the exquisite shapes and delicacy of flesh-tints could not veil their voluptuous suggestiveness.

When Kildee first looked at them, a hot blush scorched her cheek. Mme. Gonzalis laughed.

“Little Ignorance!” she said. “These are works of art. The most refined ladies study them and admire their frank fidelity to nature. You must get over this school-girl squeamishness. Here, let us look at the books.”

They occupied a set of shelves draped with purple velvet. Nearly all of them were translations of French novels. Balzac, Sand, and Dumas, and their more modern counterparts were here in gilt Russia. Kildee had never read any of them: knew nothing of the subtle evil that permeated them; but she had a passionate love for books, and she looked greedily at the wide-margined, clear-typed pages.

“You must find your chief entertainment here, my love,” said Mme. Gonzalis, sinking into a rocking-chair, and indicating the book-shelves with a slim finger, “for I warn you that you will have no society here. I have no



acquaintances in Wallport; nobody ever comes here, and I shall be poor company for you. My nervous system is a perfect wreck; the mineral waters did me no good, and now I shall try entire rest. I will keep my room a good part of the time, and you must amuse yourself."

She did keep to her room and her bed, too. She never rose till near noon; then she passed hours in her rocking-chair, reading a novel or dawdling over some fancy work, only getting up to feed her canary and prattle to it, or to fill her lozenge box, or to mix the juleps which she took regularly. She took something else, as Kildee presently found out. She was a slave to opium.

Thus idleness and solitude co-operated with the insidious spirit of the place to create a moral miasma slowly enervating and undermining. Kildee felt it stealing over her, and became restless and feverish under it. The island began to seem a cage; the sea, at first a deep joy, became a voice of solemn foreboding. She sought in-doors some relief to the solitude that oppressed her. She found only the piano, the superb but tarnished old harp which she could not play, and the pictures and French novels. She did not blush so painfully now when she looked at the pictures. The symmetry of form, the glow of color appealed to her impassionate sense of beauty. The books she read with wonder and bewilderment. The world they revealed was new to her. They set her brain whirling; they confused her ideas of right and wrong before so clear.

She shook off their spell and went to Mme. Gonzalis.

"Give me some work, please—something for my hands to do—some sewing or housework; or may I garden?"

"There is nothing you need to do. I prefer to buy clothes ready made. Sophie does not wish her housework meddled with, and you need not do anything in the yard because this place does not belong to me."

"Not belong to you? Why, I thought—"

"No; you may as well know the truth! I am living



here only through the kindness of a friend. I have no means—not a dollar of my own in the world.”

“Not your home? You have no means? But you said you had money—a legacy left you.”

“Well, it is in law. I must gain a suit before it is mine.”

“Then let us go away from here and work—earn money somehow. I can, I am sure.”

“Go away, work? in my weak health—what an idea!”

“Let *me* go, then. I am strong. Let me go to the city and find work. There must be a great deal to do in such a big hive of people. Let Goff row me there; I can come back often, and bring you what I earn.”

“Foolish little dreamer! You could find nothing to do. There are too many anxious, unemployed, half-starved women there now. They would laugh at an ignorant little thing like you. And do you imagine I would let you go without me? It would be very improper. Why will you be so restless? Content yourself here for the time. Read your books, amuse yourself. I will take care you are fed and clothed.”

“But I can not be content; I do not want to be content—here in somebody else’s house, fed perhaps by somebody else’s bounty. Who is the owner of the house, and where is he?”

“He is called Carleon, and I do not know where he is. He has other homes, and he travels a great deal. We are welcome to stay here.”

“But I do not want to stay here, and I can not. The place seems like a jail to me.”

“It is because you have led such a roving life with those play people.”

“Oh! would to Heaven I were with them now!” Kildee cried passionately.

“They do not seem to share your wish!” returned Mme. Gonzalis, a faint sneer upon her mouth. “You have never heard from them, I think.”



“Something is wrong: they have written, I know; they have not forgotten me so soon.”

“I do not know. Those stage people are light. Their profession makes every feeling seem a sort of play, on which the curtain can easily drop. Mark my words, they will never trouble themselves about you.”

“I will not believe it; they are good and true. Lottie loved me, I know; and Max—oh! Max has cared for me and watched over me nearly all my life.”

“He wanted you to play a support to the girl, Lottie—his lady-love. He is her lover—I could see that. He will probably marry her in a little while.”

“Max Lottie’s lover! Oh, how absurd!” said Kildee, tears of bitter vexation springing to her eyes.

“Why is it absurd?” questioned the Spanish woman, sharply, her black eyes full on Kildee’s face. Kildee could have given no reason. She only said:

“Everything is absurd that you have told me about my friends. It seems so mean to look at them in that light. I can not bear it. I wish they had let me die in the garret.”

“You are merely learning what life is,” Mrs. Gonzalis said, coolly eating a sweatmeat from her lozenge-box.

“Is everybody selfish and heartless, then?”

“Yes; every one,” the woman said, with bitter emphasis.

“I’ll meet them with their own weapons, then!” Kildee cried. “I’ll go out in the world and arm myself with selfishness, and fight for and win a place to stand and work in. I’ll make Goff take me with him to-morrow. You must not try to keep me from going. I will come back when I have seen what I can do.”

Mrs. Gonzalis did not reply; but that evening she sent a note to Carleon. It had been his idea to let Kildee stay a few weeks in his home on the island that solitude, the separation from and seeming neglect of her friends, and the sensuous influences surrounding her might operate on her



sensitive imagination and make her more ready to welcome his society when he should come. He had reasoned subtly. In solitude the mind feeds on its own imaginings, and when these are stimulated by insidiously evil surroundings the whole being becomes fevered. Kildee vaguely felt the moral malaria creeping into her young blood, and all the pure, strong instincts of her nature rose against it and urged her to escape from these influences.

“I will tell Goff he must take me to the main shore to-morrow,” she said to herself, as she stood in the red sunset illumination, watching the Russian’s returning boat. She had seen it a long way off, and waited impatiently for it to approach. She had still a faint hope of hearing from her friends—from Max at least. At last, the boat grated on the sand, the tall Russian stepped out.

“Goff, is there a letter for me?”

He shook his head. She turned off with starting tears.

“Let them go,” she mused bitterly. “I will never write to them, never think of them again. Yes, they are light, as she said; they are heartless. How could they seem to love me so and then so soon forget me! And Max, who was more than a brother—I must put them out of my thoughts and make a new beginning of life to-morrow. Goff,” she said, turning round to the Russian, “are you going to the city in the morning?”

“Yes,” he answered gruffly.

“I am going with you. You go early, I think; I will be ready.”

He looked at her without speaking. His stolid stare disturbed her. She did not know that he had been told “she was wrong in her head,” and was kept on the island as in a kind of private asylum. He had no intention of doing as she said, unless Mrs. Gonzalis sanctioned her wish.

The next morning Kildee was vexed to hear that Goff had gone before she eat her breakfast. Something was needed in a hurry, Mrs. Gonzalis explained, and Kildee was



forced to postpone her trip to the main shore. She did not know when the Russian returned. She passed the long, warm afternoon in her room reading. When the shadows lengthened she went down to the shore and stood there motionless, thinking over the vague plans she had been trying to shape for her future. When the sun's red ball had dropped below the water, she went back to the house, and sat down near a west window in the drawing-room. The sunset crimson faded into purple. Shadowy, yet life-like looked the tiptoe Danae on the wall—naked, passion-pale, with eager, lifted arms, to receive her descending Jove. The jasmine scent was overpoweringly sweet, so was the low murmur of the sea winds.

“Oh, if I had some one to share this life with me!” was the unspoken sigh of the girl, whom the sweet, voluptuous idleness stung to a vague unrest.

She started up. She had heard a note of music—a melodious quiver of the strings of the old gilded harp, standing in the recess of the curtained bay-window. She stood perfectly still and listened. The strings were touched again; harmonious chords were struck; then they grew into a faint symphony. Through the fringes of the curtains she had glimpses of a black-clad arm, a white hand sweeping the strings. She softly approached the recess, and when the music stopped she drew back a fold of the curtain, exclaiming:

“Why, mamma, you never told me you could play on the harp!”

She started. She had come face to face with a stranger—a man, fair, handsome, with dark blue eyes that smiled kindly on her confusion as he rose, and bending his graceful head before her, begged that she would not let him drive her away.

“If you will stay and read as absorbedly as you were doing just now, I will make no more disturbing noises. This old harp shall be as silent as the one that hung—



“ ‘On the witch-elm that shades St. Filan’s Spring.’

I only played to see if you were real flesh and blood or a new statue that had been added to my collection in my absence.”

“Then you were here all the while?”

“I came in while you were reading—or dreaming, which was it? I came home to-day, at noon, while you were taking your siesta, and I went to my room to follow your example, for I was worn out with traveling.”

“You are not the owner of the island, surely?”

“Why not?”

“Oh, I thought he was an old, or at least an elderly gentleman.”

“I am elderly,” Carleon said, with his smile.

“You?” She shook her head.

“Yes, I am the owner of the island—Carleon you may call me. I don’t come here often. I am a wanderer, but I like to drop sometimes and fold my wings for a little rest. Don’t let my advent put you out at all. Mrs. Gonzalis knows my ways. I am a quiet old bachelor—as harmless as your pet kitten—if you have one, which I doubt. You looked as solitary as Iphigenia, standing out yonder on the sea-shore.” (“So he was watching me, then,” thought fluttered Kildee, marveling at the fascination of his voice and the sweetness of his smile.)

“I am afraid you are lonely here.”

“It is lonely sometimes,” Kildee admitted. “My mother is not well, and likes to be left to herself.”

“Why don’t you make this grand lady talk to you?”—touching the harp.

“I have never learned the magic word to compel her to speak.”

“And you would like to learn?”

“Yes, I love music. I can play a little on the violin and the banjo, but I know nothing about the harp; only I like it. Its sound makes me think of winds and waves.”



“It was made out of the soul and form of a sea-nymph, you know. What! You have not heard the legend? Listen.”

He swept his white hand over the chords in the rippling prelude to the “Origin of the Harp,” then sung it; the sensuous sweet air according well with his rich deep-throated voice.

“I shall stay on the island longer than usual, this time, I think; will you let me teach you a little on the harp?” he asked, running his fingers through his light curls and looking up at Kildee.

“You are very kind, but we are not to be here long—at least I am not.”

“Where are you going?”

“I don’t know yet—I am going to get something to do. It seems we have no money—only the prospect of some; so I am going to work and earn a support for us.”

“You—my child?” smiling in kindly derision. “What can you do?”

“Nothing that is great or grand. I am quite ignorant, but there are many little things I can do, and do well; and I am quick to learn. I don’t dislike to work either, though it is pleasant to do nothing sometimes.”

“If you are spoiling for something to do, I wish you would take my gardener in hand and put him to work getting the grounds in better condition. They are sadly gone to wreck. The shrubbery and flower-beds are nearly ruined. Can I employ you as supervisor?”

“Employ, Mr. Carleon; you can command our services. We are dependent on you,” she answered with a little bitterness in her tones.

“I like to think I can command you, but you must not speak of dependence. You are my guests. Mrs. Gonzalis is an old friend. And now, if I may command you, will you please have the candles lighted?”

“I will light them,” she said, and went across the hall



to Mrs. Gonzalis's room for matches. She found that lady restlessly walking the floor.

"Come here, Kildee," she called sharply, and when the girl approached, she put her hands on her shoulders and looked keenly into her face.

"You have seen Mr. Carleon; you have talked with him?"

"Yes—mamma. Why did you not tell me about him?"

"Why should I tell you?"

"Why, that he was so—so nice and pleasant."

"And handsome?"

"Oh, he is very handsome," said Kildee, coloring under the woman's searching eyes. "He asked me to light the tall wax candles; they have not been lighted since he came. Ought I not to change my dress before tea?"

"Yes; go, I will light the candles."

"She is partly under his spell already," Mrs. Gonzalis whispered to herself, sinking into her chair, and locking her slim, nervous fingers. "And if he should not marry her! but he must. He shall not wrong her."

When Kildee came to tea in the simple white dress with the short clustering curls bound back with a ribbon, she looked so innocently lovely that a shade of remorse swept over Mme. Gonzalis's face, and she threw an appealing look at Carleon. He answered it with a careless half-smile and a shrug of his fine shoulders.

There was beautiful moonlight, and the three walked on the terrace after tea. Carleon put forth his rare powers of pleasing—his art of varied talk and suggestive silence—of listening with that rapt, flattering attentiveness; his low, liquid laugh, his interest in the health and welfare of the being he wished to fascinate.

It was not hard to seem in this case. It was seldom his *blasé* eyes had rested on anything sweeter than Kildee in her white dress, with the poetry of her nature giving a peculiar, unspeakable grace to her movements and to every-



thing she said. She was so happy at having companionship after her long loneliness.

And such companionship! She listened to him in delight. His gentle, respectful appreciation won her from her shyness and charmed her into uttering thoughts and feelings she had expressed to no one, not even Max. For not even he seemed to understand her like this sweet-voiced, sympathetic stranger, not crudely young and overjoyous, but with a shade of melancholy in his polished tones and his dark blue eyes.

"Have I made a good impression?" Carleon asked of Mme. Gonzalis, when Kildee had said good-night.

He was leaning against a tree, lazily puffing at his freshly lighted cigar.

"No need to ask *me*," the woman answered, bitterly.

She was remembering old loves and old wrongs.

"Surely some Mephistopheles gave you the power of charming whom you please. Have you also the gift of perennial youth? Will you never grow old, never repent?"

He laughed low.

"See you signs of either in my aspect? But say, is not the little one a sight to make even an old man young? Such a lightsome step, such a bird-like glance! Will the bird come easily into the trap, think you?"

"No," Mme. Gonzalis said, shortly.

"I don't object to that. I like difficulty. She has the passionate purity of Juliet."

"You surely mean to marry her; you promised—"

"Not I. I made no promise."

"But you will—you surely will?"

"*Nous verrons*. It depends upon my mood and upon her."

"I will not see her wronged. I will warn her—I will take her away. This is too wicked, too dreadful!"

"Yes," he answered, dryly. "It is pretty bad—worse,



no doubt, than work, and debt, and hard fare—doing without wines and French bonbons and—morphine.”

She sat silent, faint quivers passed through her frame. He knew his shot had told.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

THE dead calm of the day was about to be broken. Signs of strife were in the air. In opposite quarters of the sky, clouds were marshaling their forces. Tongues of flame leaped out at intervals, muttering thunders grew louder as the aerial cohorts neared their meeting in mid-heaven. Presently down rushed the rain flood.

Miss Montcalm and Ira Heathcliff watched it from her drawing-room window. She did not blanch at the lightning; a chord of her being responded to the music of the storm. When the climax came in a thunder-burst that seemed the clash of colliding Titans, she snatched her fingers from her lover's hold and clasped her hands with an impulse more full of ecstasy than fear.

He looked at her uneasily. Dearly as he loved her, there were some moods of hers that troubled him. He caught glimpses in her of a restless intensity, an impatience of commonplace, an impassioned love of the grand and heroic which made it difficult, if not impossible, to reach or keep up to the standard she exacted.

It was a glorious thing to be loved by such a spirited, high-bred creature, but there was not much rest in it.

When, at length, the fire and sound of the cloud-contest were quenched in the down-pour, Honor drew a full breath and turned her deep-lit eyes upon Heathcliff.

“I like that,” she said. “It electrifies me to my finger tips. I like lightning whether it flashes from clouds or human faces. I might never have given *you* a second



thought, Sir Ira, had I not seen the lightning flash from those cloudy gray eyes upon the burly policeman who was dragging the old man to the lock-up, in spite of his little daughter's protest that he was not drunk, but only sick. That flash made the big brute drop his raised club and hang his head as though struck by a veritable thunderbolt; do you remember?"

"I remember who stopped her carriage and took the old man to the hospital—a good act, that made *me* give a second thought to one I had heard of as a mere city belle, with a heart as light as her plumes."

"As I had heard of you, sir, as a man without any such troublesome appendage as a heart—a money-making machine, grim and hard as the engines in your pet factory; your championship of the old man showed a wider side to your character. As for a softer side—"

"You saw that when I fell in love with you and became as wax in your hands."

"Not much of the wax in your composition," she said, looking up with pride at her square-shouldered, firm-lipped hero. "Not much softness, even in your love-making," she added, presently.

He detected the slight bitterness there was in her tone.

"I told you, dear Honor, that it was not my nature to show enthusiasm."

"Yet you *do* possess enthusiasm. You show it in the pursuit of money and honors. Your ambition, though it is so quiet, is deep and strong. Ira," teasingly, but with a questioning wistfulness in her dark eyes, "I do believe you look forward more anxiously to the fifteenth of November, when you will probably be elected, than to the twentieth of September (only three weeks off; I can hardly realize it), when Honor Montcalm will give herself into your keeping—perhaps."

"You know well that is not so. But why do you say 'perhaps'? Why should there be any 'perhaps' in the



case? What but death can interpose to prevent our marriage?"

"Oh! many things," she answered, archly, but with a slight shade on her brow. "One of us may find out that he or she is not what had been believed; or I may draw back on the brink, afraid of that step in the dark, which means more than life or death to a woman. Marriage is a great risk."

"Are you afraid to dare it, Honor?"

Again she looked up at him. Her subtle glance seemed trying to pierce through his eyes to his inmost heart and read its secrets.

"No," she answered at last. "I am not afraid to dare it—for you. You have told me I was first in your heart, and you are true."

She waited as if to receive some answering assurance to her words, but he only tightened his clasp upon her hand. She fancied that a cloud crossed his face.

"Yes," she repeated, "I know that you are *true*. I put truth above tenderness; honor above love. With me to doubt would be to despise. At the first false ring I should detect the base metal and cast it from me."

"And you are quick to detect the false ring—to listen for it."

"Ah, you think me suspicious. My father says I am. I do not believe it. He says, too, that I require those I love to come up to impossible ideals. Do you think I am such an impracticable dreamer?"

He evaded the question. "You do dream impracticably sometimes, do you not? For instance, that dream about the white hand and arm reaching out and tearing off your bridal veil at the altar. Confess that it was this same dream that made you say 'perhaps' just now when you spoke of our marriage. Yes, and it is this that influences you not to want any one invited to witness it."

"No, it was not the dream. I am not quite so supersti-



tious. It was—I'll let you call it a mere whim. I can't analyze it. For one thing, there is no need of invitations. Our friends will all be at the church that night to see the marriage of Cousin Monde and Doctor Carlton. Let the double wedding come as a surprise. Then I did not want Madame Grundy to be gossiping about my marriage beforehand."

"Saying that the sole daughter of the proud house of Montcalm is about to stoop her bright head and wed a plain maker of cloth, with no coat-of-arms but a steam-engine—"

"Rather, Madame Grundy will declare that Honor Montcalm has played her cards cleverly and won a rich husband to prop the decaying fortunes of her house. 'A good thing for her,' madame will say, with a shrug, 'but for *him*! Well, he will have his hands full.'"

"Fortunately he likes to have his hands full," said the stately lover, smiling down into her eyes, while he held both her delicate hands between his broad palms. Her proud eyes grew misty and her lip quivered as she returned his look. It was plain to be seen it was not for his money this beautiful woman loved her rich suitor.

One who watched her felt this with a pang of keen pain. The intensity of a look drew her eyes to the window which she sat facing. It opened on the piazza. A dark face appeared between the dropped lace curtains; a hand beckoned to her imperatively. She hesitated before she obeyed the summons. She would not do it covertly.

"Excuse me a moment," she said. "Mr. Hall beckoned me at the window. He has been with papa in the library. Papa wants me, I suppose."

She parted the curtains of the French window and stepped out upon the piazza. Young Hall had withdrawn further from the window, and stood leaning against a pillar.

"Don't look at me so witheringly; I have not been eaves-dropping," he said, as she came near. "I have just come



from your father's room. I was going out when I caught a glimpse of your face lighted up with such love, such trust for *him*—that man who is not worthy of you. I could not resist the sudden impulse to warn you against him once more. He is *not true*. He visits at the Red House, and it is not as the business agent of a deformed old woman. There is another—a secret inmate of the Red House—a young and beautiful woman. It is she Mayor Heathcliff goes to see.”

He turned off and ran down the steps into the rainy, dimly-lighted night. She stood listening mechanically to his footsteps on the sodden walk, wondering if he were mad, or if it was bitter malice that made him traduce the man whom fortune had placed above him. She went back into the drawing-room, but the perfect charm of the hour was fatally flawed. She dreaded to be questioned, and was in no mood to talk or listen; so she went to the piano and played all Heathcliff's favorite pieces, winding up with something full of minor chords and sobbing cadences that chimed well with the dreary night.

When at length she stopped and leaned back wearily, Heathcliff said:

“You look tired. I will not keep you up any longer. I had forgotten you were at the party last night.”

“I looked for you; why were you not there?”

“I had to be busy; besides, I do not care for parties, as you know. I go nowhere but as business calls me, only *here*.”

“And to the Red House—”

“Oh, that is one of the places where business calls me.”

“Are you very sure?”—smiling playfully but with keen earnestness in her tones. “Is there no one at the Red House but old Miss Faust?”

“Not another white soul. I never met any one there in my life but Miss Faust and her two black servants. She admits no visitors.”



The assertion was emphatic enough; yet Honor was not quite satisfied. Her ear detected a slight unsteadiness in his tones, her eye perceived an unmistakable change in his countenance—a slight twitching of the muscles about his mouth. Was he speaking falsely?

She tried to drive away the doubt as absurd and disloyal, but it would not “down” at her bidding. It haunted her after he had gone.

“I foresee it will torture me into seeing young Hall again and demanding him to prove his assertion—to let me see with my own eyes. To humble myself so is humiliating; but I must do it. There can be no rest for me until I do.”

One while she half determined to tell Heathcliff what young Hall had said, but her promise had been given to Hazard not to speak of it. Then the consequence might be serious. It was plain that both men disliked each other already. She knew Heathcliff’s stern nature, Hazard’s fiery recklessness. A quarrel, a fight, a scandal would probably result should she tell her lover of the warning she had received. Nor could she bring herself to speak of it to her father. Setting aside her promise not to do this, she could not bear to break up the strong attachment existing between her father and his young protégé. The general looked lost if young Hall did not drop in once a day for half an hour to discuss political news and gossip in his brilliant, sharp, cynical way. She determined to wait; all might be explained. Hazard was perhaps honest in his warning; only he was, yes, he surely *must be* deceived. And yet that change of countenance, that unsteadiness of tone when the mayor had answered her question concerning the inmates of the Red House—what did they mean?



## CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN Kildee came down to the beach next morning, in pursuance of her plan to have Goff row her to Wallport, she found Carleon seated in the boat, idly dipping the oars into the smooth water.

“I have set Goff to work on the shrubbery,” he said. “Will you accept me as a gondolier? This blue water and bluer sky suggests Venice.”

As he stood up to arrange the buff and white awning he looked down at Kildee and said, persuasively:

“It is early; suppose we row around the island before going across to shore. You would like to see the limit of your little empire.”

Kildee felt no disposition to object. The morning was fine, and her spirits rebounded from their previous depression. Carleon was merry and kind. He said not a word to dissuade her from her idea of being independent, but before the row around the island was over he had artfully induced her to intrust her plans to him to forward. He had promised to find out what employment she could obtain in Wallport, and to see about board for her mother and herself.

“I know you find it lonely here,” he said, “and I understand your wish to be independent; it is a natural and right feeling. Still, I am selfish enough to wish you to stay as long as I remain. I know this house is not home-like or neat, with all its fine appointments. How could it be when it scarcely has even a servant’s care? it is almost impossible to get native servants to stay in such a lonely place. A house, to be home-like, must have the frequent touches of a woman’s hand.”

Kildee mentally resolved that she would attack the dis-



order of the mansion next day, and would help Goff with the shrubbery and flower-beds. She had not been permitted to do anything about the place before. The work would be a boon to her.

The boat had moved very lazily round the little island. Carleon stopped often to point out some aspect of water or sky or sand-bar, some wave skimming bird or clump of shrubbery or bit of rock-work on the shore. By the time they returned to the landing and the little boat house it was noon, and the sun was hot overhead.

“We will go home and get some luncheon,” Carleon said, “and I will go to Wallport this afternoon and see what opening I can find for you.”

They had luncheon together in the cool little breakfast-room, where roses nodded at the window. The freshly-gathered grapes, the red-pulped figs and cream, the butter and foam-like bread, were enjoyed by Kildee with unalloyed zest. Afterward she took her first lesson on the harp. Then Carleon induced her to read to him. He lay on the divan, listening to her fresh voice and watching the long brown lashes drooping against her cheeks, and the round arms escaping from the loose muslin sleeves. The trip to Wallport was postponed until another day.

The next morning Kildee, in a cool print gown and white apron, busied herself for several hours in dusting furniture, arranging books and pictures, and making the rooms more tidy. In the afternoon she helped Goff, who was at work trimming the vines and hedges. Carleon came out and lent the help of his white, plump hands. As he was tying up a long refractory spray of Lady Banksia his hand touched Kildee's, his fingers closed over hers, and he said:

“Enough work for to-day. We will go now and look at the ‘Illustrated Dante’ I told you of. I found it this morning. The pictures are worth studying. I will bring it out to the summer-house.”

In the shade of the large leaves, just stirred by the sea-



breath, Kildee listened, for the first time, to the deep organ music of Dante's verse.

Carleon would have read her the story of Francesca Di Rimini, but as he began it he glanced up and saw her sitting near him—her little face so sweetly intent, so thoughtful yet childlike, under the shady hat, one hand lying across her white-aproned lap with a cape jasmine bud in the slim fingers; when he saw her thus he stopped short. Francesca's story would be too discordant to that picture. He shut the book.

“We will go and feed the pigeons,” he said.

The summer days went by. Carleon professed to have found a situation for Kildee in Wallport—a place in the mailing department of a paper. But it would not be vacant for a week yet. Meantime, she found household work enough to interest her, and she had the most fascinating companionship in the world. Carleon was at his best. He was acting *en masque*—his real nature wholly put aside. The new rôle amused him. And he was thoroughly interested in Kildee; more than interested, he became charmed. He tried to throw off the feeling with his usual careless disdain, but it had fastened upon him. Fate meant through it to work her revenge upon the man who had laughed at all deep, earnest feelings. Never before had this man been thrown into daily domestic association with a nature pure and sweet, yet bright and intelligent, with a singular, quaintly-charming mixture of childish frankness and womanly dignity. He did not find her as wax to his hands either. She did not absorb his views when they were contrary to her clear intuitions. She swept away his sentimental cobweb sophisms with a single breath of her clear common sense. She looked up to him with undisguised admiration; sometimes he fancied she was under the glamour he boasted he could throw over any woman he tried to win; a sun-bright glance, a free laugh, a frank, fearless utterance would prove to him that she was unfettered.



He became impatient; his undisciplined nature chafed against the restraint he was obliged to exercise over it. This elusive creature, half Kelpie, half domestic fairy, held him aloof by a strong yet frail-seeming spell that he grew savagely anxious to break. It became hard to wear the mask.

“It will drop some day,” he said to himself. And it did.

He had dreaded to have the “mask slip,” because he felt that the girl would hate him if she caught but a glimpse of his real self. He had abandoned any thought of winning her dishonorably. She was to be his wife, and he was trying to gain her love. Never before had he been other than self confident where winning a woman was concerned; but now he became feverishly anxious, almost timid. He trusted to keep her blinded to his true character until she was firmly bound to him. She was so young, she had had little experience; it was not likely she would suspect him of being other than the kind, noble being he seemed. He did not take into account the swift, lightning-like instincts given to woman for her guide and protection—instincts that flash conviction upon the mind in a single instant, independent of reason.

At the cloudy close of a day the two were together in the drawing-room. Carleon had just finished giving Kildee her lesson on the harp, and he sat idly twanging the strings, with his eye fixed on Kildee, who was sitting near the window watching the cloudy daylight fade over the unquiet sea. Presently he struck some soft chords and began to sing an impassioned love-song. Kildee, listening, was stirred by the wistful melody. It bore her thoughts away beyond the words or the music, to the friends she had loved and had lost by a fate, it seemed, more cruel than death. A wave of wild yearning went over her; she bowed her face on her hands.

In an instant Carleon was beside her. Now (he believed)



was his hour. He put his arm around her and tried to draw her to him. She shrunk from him firmly, yet with gentleness, and he desisted, wondering at himself. But he took away one of the hands that covered her face and put it to his cheek.

“Tears on these little fingers,” he said, tenderly. “Dearest Kildee, why are you sad?”

He thought he understood the cause of her emotion—that it was the awakening of love for himself. She was troubled, embarrassed; she tried to draw her hand away.

“I was thinking of my friends who used to love me,” she said. “I was thinking of Max—”

“*Max?*” He was savagely disappointed; his fingers closed fiercely upon her hand; he drew her to him with passionate force.

“You must forget Max,” he said. “You are mine—*mine!*”

She looked up at him—a quick, startled glance. The mask had fallen. In the gloating animal eyes, as he looked down at her, she read the true nature of the man. With sudden strength she wrenched herself free from him and ran from the room.

She reached her own chamber and stood clinging to the chimney-piece, her heart throbbing like a fawn that hears the dogs.

“What must I do?” was the confused query that came with the impulse to quit the place at once.

She heard a step behind her, and started up, remembering that she had not fastened her door. She saw a strange woman coming toward her, a woman of fine, large shape with black, defiant eyes and curled red lips. She stopped before Kildee and looked at her from head to foot.

“So this is my successor!” she said, with a sneering turn of her lip.

“Who are you? What do you want here?” Kildee asked.



“You can guess who I am, I think. As to why I’m come to this house, that is my business. I’m here in your room to take a look at my lord’s latest fancy. Such a fancy! A baby face, a chit in short frocks!”

“What do you mean?” demanded Kildee. The woman laughed a coarse, grating laugh.

“You know very well what I mean,” she said. “Don’t play innocence with me.”

“I think you mean to insult me. Leave the room this instant!” Kildee cried. She had crimsoned under that look and laugh. Now she faced the intruder, white with scorn, and pointed imperiously to the door.

Instead of going the woman dropped into a seat and stared into the girl’s clear, proud eyes.

“How finely you carry it off! One would think— But no; I know better. You needn’t trouble yourself to put on those airs with *me*.”

“With you? Who *are* you?”

“Can’t you guess? Hasn’t he told you in his sneering way of Madeleine, whom he cast off like a half-worn glove? He’ll throw you off in the same way when he tires of you, and it doesn’t take him long to get tired, as this house could tell if its walls could speak.”

“Are you speaking of Mr. Carleon? Is he really a wicked man?”

The woman caught up the candle from the table and held it close to Kildee’s face, and gazed at her a full half minute without speaking. Then she said, in an altered voice:

“Tell me honestly, woman to woman, what are you to Miles Carleon?”

“Nothing—the acquaintance of a few days.”

“Then what in God’s name are you doing in this house?”

“My mother brought me here. Mr. Carleon is an old friend of hers. He kindly offered her the use of his house until she found a home.”



“Kind! And you say that woman—Madame Gonzalis—is your mother? I did not know she had a daughter.”

“I was separated from her when I was a little child. She found me only a few weeks ago.”

“Your mother! And she brought you here! *She* knew Miles Carleon; she knew this place. Child, it is a horrible pity that you should be here. Shall I tell you why you were brought here?”

“No, tell me nothing more!” cried Kildee, pale as death, but with steady resolve in her eyes. “I am going away, now, this very night.”

“You don’t want to stay then; you don’t care for him; he has not thrown his spell over you?” queried Madeleine rapidly. She peered close into the girl’s face with eager eyes. Kildee drew back and motioned her off with a gesture quietly imperative. She vouchsafed no answer to the woman’s question; she only asked:

“How did you come to the island?”

“I got a man to row me here; the boat is waiting for me now. I brought a folding-ladder to get over the wall.”

“Show me where it is; I will find the boat and send it back for you, if you are not going now.”

As she spoke she caught up her hat and put it on. Then she threw open her trunk and took out the little green netted purse, containing three gold pieces, which Lottie had given her as a parting present. The sight of it brought up a vision of her kind friends and a memory of the farewell prayer which Mamma Duck had said over her. She broke into a dry sob and said, pressing her hands together:

“And my mother did this! My mother! God grant she may not be my mother!” Then turning to Madeleine:

“Let us go,” she said, “now, this instant.”

The woman looked at her with a strange mixture or rather transition of expressions—admiration, shame, relief.

“Yes,” she whispered, “you are innocent. This is no place for such as you—only for lost creatures as I am. But



I will help to save you. No, don't give me any credit for it; I deserve none. I care for the man you despise. He has a hold on me. But for you he might wish me back. So I will help you get away; but we must be secret about it. He must not know."

"Why, I will walk out before their eyes. They dare not prevent me. How dared they bring me here? Cruel, shameless!"

Once more a sob choked her. This time the tears came. She dried them quickly.

"Come on," she said. "We will be secret if you think best. The house seems quiet."

She softly turned the handle of the door, but she stood as if transfixed. She confronted a mocking face; the master of Aphrodite barred her egress.

"Were you going out, ladies? Shall I have the honor of accompanying you?" Carleon said, bowing, a smile on his handsome mouth, but a green flash in his sea-blue eyes that made Madeleine cower. But Kildee gave flash for flash.

"I will not stay in this house a moment longer. Let me pass," she said.

He looked amazed. So lately the shy, yet trusting child, now the haughty, commanding woman. But he admired her exceedingly; he felt more than ever determined not to lose her.

"Be calm, my dear young lady. You shall leave my house whenever you wish. You have made it very pleasant for me, but I could not think of keeping you against your will. I am afraid you are now acting under some false idea, perhaps suggested by this woman here."

He turned away from the bewildered girl and approached Madeleine, who had retreated to a little distance.

"I see you are anxious to have your allowance withdrawn. Are you also desirous that I should expose you in the matter of *the stolen jewels*?"

She turned white and lifted her great eyes imploringly.



"Mercy, Miles. You would not crush a woman who loved you? I did not influence her to this. She wanted to go. She does not like you. She—"

"Silence," he said. "Go now and never dare set foot on this island again." She gave him a look full of fury and flung herself out of the room. He went back to Kildee, who had again approached the door. "One moment," he said gently. "You'll wait until morning. Believe me, no harm is meant you. Have I ever shown you any disrespect? This woman has deceived you for a purpose. I was once—engaged to her, but broke with her because she proved unworthy. This is her revenge. No; you are in no danger under my roof. Remain here to-night; consult your mother. If you decide to go away you will be better prepared than if you took this hasty flight."

The calm, soft tones, with their under-chord of grieved reproach, the sad, earnest eyes—could it be possible that they were false; a part of his skillful mask? Had she wronged the man in her thought? No; she recalled that look when he drew her to him. She could never forget that look. It was one of those sudden revelations that burn themselves on the soul.

"I will stay until morning," she said. "Please leave me now and send Madame—, my mother, to me."

Carleon bent his head and quitted the room. On the landing of the stairs he encountered Mrs. Gonzalis.

"Sophie told me you sent for me," she said, looking at his agitated face in wonder.

"I did. I want to say this to you: You lie on your lounge in a semi-dream from day to day and neglect my interests."

"What have I done?" she asked, haughtily.

"Simply nothing; but you were to do something in return for my bounty. You were to influence that girl to regard me favorably, and she—hates me."

"Hates you? Impossible!" Madame Gonzalis said, but



her eyes had shot one gleam of relief, and Carleon had detected it.

“ You rejoice at it I see. You are treacherous at heart. No doubt you had a hand in bringing Madeleine here.”

“ Madeleine here? Has Kildee seen her?”

“ You play your part well. Now listen to me: That girl shall not escape me.”

“ You *do* mean dishonorably by her then; let me tell you—”

“ Silence! I mean honorably by her, if you call a marriage with me an honorable thing. I have always meant to marry her. Would I have taken such pains to please her else? I would marry her to-night if I could, but she has a will of steel in spite of her childlike softness. Marry me she shall, however. Joel Gibson is a magistrate; you are her mother, so called; Goff and Sophie are good enough witnesses. To-morrow I go for my license. I will marry her in this house within three days. Go and prepare her to receive me as a husband. Tell her the worldly advantages of the step, the necessity of it. Tell her that you have no means to live upon, and that she can do nothing that will keep you both from starvation. Tell her I will love her as I never before loved a woman. I will plead my own cause to her afterward. Exert yourself in my behalf; you shall reap the benefit if I succeed. I am anxious to have her marry me willingly; but if not by good will, then by force.”

His face grew hard as marble as he uttered the last words. The candle shook in the woman's hand. She said not a word; she felt that she must obey. The chief point was gained. He had said positively that he would marry Kildee, and she knew from his eye and the ring of his voice that he spoke the truth. She had never seen him so terribly in earnest.



## CHAPTER XX.

MADAME GONZALIS went straight to Kildee's room. She found her sitting by the table, composed and tearless, though profoundly sad. She was thinking what she should do when she landed in the strange city of Wallport next morning. She determined to leave Aphrodite Island as early as she could get away.

"Kildee—Kildee, look at me."

She started and faced her *pseudo* mother. The look in her eyes made Madame Gonzalis involuntarily withdraw the hand she had placed on the girl's shoulder and fall back a step.

"What do you want with me?" asked Kildee coldly.

"I know what has happened. That miserable, half-crazed woman has frightened you into believing her wild words and acting unkindly, unjustly to our best friend—our benefactor."

"Benefactor! Do not talk of his benefactions to me. Reject them; leave his house if you wish me to keep a particle of respect for you," cried Kildee, starting up with blazing cheeks.

"Are you really so unreasonable as to wish to leave the only roof that offers us a shelter?"

"I would rather shelter myself under the naked sky. I leave this house in the morning, never to enter it again."

"And leave me—your mother—your invalid mother?"

"If you will go with me, I will try to find shelter for us both, and I will work to support you. If you refuse to go, I must leave you."

"You quite forget that you are not yet your own mistress. You are not legally old enough to discard parental authority."

"Nevertheless, I must take my destiny in my own



hands. I can not trust you—my mother though you may be. Oh, that I had a true mother—a good mother—as Lottie has.”

The passionate cry made Madame Gonzalis stand silent and pale for a moment. Then she came closer to Kildee. She seated herself and drew the girl close to her.

“Listen to me, my child,” she said. “You are making yourself miserable, when you should be happy. You misunderstood Mr. Carleon just now. He was on the point of offering you a destiny, brighter than even I could have hoped for you. Kildee, you can remain here in this beautiful home as its mistress—as the loved and honored wife of Miles Carleon.”

“I would not be his wife for a cityful of homes.”

Kildee’s quiet tones were firm as steel. Mrs. Gonzalis felt at once that her decision was final, yet she tried to combat it.

“You are mad,” she said; “you must be. Mr. Carleon is rich, accomplished, a gentleman by birth and breeding. And he loves you fondly; he will do everything to please and gratify you. You will be the envy of every woman in Wallport.”

“And my own scorn. Don’t say any more, please. Nothing could induce me to marry Mr. Carleon.”

“Yet you seemed to admire him greatly only yesterday. Is it possible a crazy woman’s story could change your feeling so?”

“She is not crazy. But it is not first, nor chiefly, what the woman said; it was what I saw in his face, and what he said—just a gleam, just a word or two, but enough. I will not marry him, if my life depends on my doing it.”

Mrs. Gonzalis started up in sudden fury. She saw the hopelessness of Carleon’s cause. She saw herself turned from the luxury and indolence of Aphrodite Mansion.

“Obstinate, ungrateful girl!” she cried. “You shall repent this. I will show you that you can not set aside my



authority so easily. You wish to escape from my charge that you may hunt up those strolling players, who are glad to be rid of you, and throw yourself in the arms of that young vagabond you are in love with. But we will see whose will is the stronger."

She quitted the room without another look at the pale, miserable, yet sternly set face of the girl.

Kildee passed a wakeful night, agitated by painful, despondent thoughts, but never faltering in her determination to leave Aphrodite Island in the morning. She rose before sunrise, dressed herself, finished packing her trunk, and went down-stairs. Her mother's door was fast, and there was no response to her knock.

She went to the little building in the yard occupied by Goff and his wife. Goff usually went very early to Wallport to attend the morning market; but now she saw him standing on the steps of the tiny cottage with nothing in his appearance to betoken an intention of starting on his trip across the bay.

"Are you not going to Wallport this morning, Goff?" she asked.

He answered in his usual gruff way that he was not.

"Well, I want you to go that you may take me. Mr. Carleon is willing; and here is your pay," holding out some silver.

He looked greedily at the money, but shook his head.

"It's against your mother's orders," he said. "Couldn't go if you give me a handful of money."

"I must try to row myself across, then," Kildee said. "I don't know anything about handling the oars, but some boat may come to my help. If not, I can but drown."

She walked around to the front of the house and down the graveled walk, not heeding the dewy, fresh opened flowers or the flashing fountain. When she reached the gate, set in the tall spear-pointed iron fence that encircled the grounds, she found it fastened. She remembered that



this gate as well as the one in the rear were always kept locked. She returned to Goff to procure the key; but failed to get it. He declared he had given it to Mrs. Gonzalis. Kildee found she must wait until that lady's late hour for rising.

She breakfasted alone. Mr. Carleon, Sophie told her, had had his coffee half an hour ago and had gone out in the grounds. Sophie brought word at last that Mrs. Gonzalis was awake; Kildee went to her room. She was sitting up in bed drinking black coffee from a tiny, old China cup. She received Kildee coldly, and, in answer to her request for the key, directed her to get it from the pocket of a dress, lying across a chair. Kildee failed to find it in the pocket.

"Then it has dropped out somewhere, and will have to be found. Get them to look for it upstairs and on the terrace, but don't trouble me; my head is ready to burst."

Kildee looked at her keenly, more than suspecting that the loss of the key was a pretense. She could say nothing, however; she could only search for the key. She looked through the two rooms and the hall Mrs. Gonzalis designated as the places in which the key might be found, then went out on the terrace. She was walking slowly with her eyes on the ground, when she came suddenly close to Carleon. He was leaning against a tree looking pale and unhappy. A faint smile brightened his eyes as he saw her, and he made a movement to approach her. Her cold look and slight bow made him pause a second, then he stepped before her and said:

"Will you sit here by me on this bench a few minutes? I have something to say to you."

She hesitated, looking him calmly in the face. She moved close to the tree and said:

"I will stand here and listen to you, Mr. Carleon."

Her cool, composed manner struck him with surprise.

"Her good blood asserts itself," he said to himself with



admiration as he looked at the little proud face and firm-set lips. More than ever was he resolved to win her.

He leaned his arm upon an outreaching branch of the oak and brought the magic of his blue, sad eyes to bear upon her.

“Kildee,” he said, in his soft, caressing tones, “your mother told you last night what I wished, what was the dearest hope of my heart; and you—well, I will not, I can not take what you said then as final. You had just been frightened by an impetuous utterance on my part; you had just been shocked by hearing a miserable story. The story was exaggerated, false; the words that escaped me were the expression of a strong, deep love. Child, I love you, as I never loved before. I am no saint; I have led a reckless sort of life, but I am tired of it. Since I knew you, I have felt what sweetness there could be in a pure love, a quiet domestic life. Can you not give me that love, that life, Kildee—my little bird—my darling?”

He bent over her, his eyes, his voice full of entreaty. Never had Miles Carleon pleaded so earnestly with a woman, never had he watched a woman's face with such intent eagerness as now he watched this little oval face that flushed rose-red under his close, passionate eyes, and paled again, but never lost its mold of proud reserve. And though her voice was low, there was no quiver of weakness in it.

“No, Mr. Carleon, I can not marry you—if this is what you ask of me.”

“Why, Kildee?”

“I do not love you; do not respect you.”

Her reply stung him with keen pain. He, who had thought himself so invincible with women, felt humbled and crushed before the frank contempt of this slim, unformed girl.

“This is your return for my kindness,” he said, white with pain and anger.



“I have asked no favor of you. You have been kind to my mother, and she thanks you; I will do the same for her sake, but for myself—I have but one kindness to ask of you—it is to help me quit this place.”

“I will do no such thing.”

“Then I will find a way to leave it without your help.”

She turned from him, slightly bending her head, and walked away. He looked after her, uttering a muttered curse, then his lip trembled and a spasm of pain swept over his face.

“She is the first creature I ever loved,” he muttered. “And to be spurned, baffled by that child! It shall not be—I swear it sha’n’t! She shall not outdo me. I will make her my wife, and after that if she does not love me she shall learn to pretend that she does.

Half an hour later Kildee, coming out on the upper veranda, saw two men in a boat, crossing the bay. She felt sure they were Goff and Carleon. She went down to her mother’s room and inquired if the key of the gate had been found.

“Yes,” her mother answered icily.

“Why did you not let me know?”

“I could not see that it was any concern of yours,” answered Mrs. Gonzalis, without looking up from the book she was reading. Then she added: “Mr. Carleon has taken the key with him.”

Carleon did not return until night. As he entered the hall Kildee saw that he was accompanied by a thickset, venerable-looking man, with white, flowing beard.

“It is the oily-tongued person whom Mrs. Gonzalis brought to prove that she was my mother,” thought Kildee. “I would know that too-benignant smile anywhere. I wonder what brings him here?”

She vaguely scented treachery, and resolved to be watchful and prompt. She had seen Goff give the keys of the gate and the boat to her mother. She determined that she



would ask Mrs. Gonzalis to sleep in her room to-night and would slip the keys from that lady's pocket while she was asleep, and try to make her escape by moonlight.

"I want no supper," she had said to Mrs. Gonzalis; but when Sophie brought up a dish of hot cream toast and a pot of tea she felt the impulse of appetite, and eat a slice of the toast, and drank two cups of the hot, strong tea. "This will keep me awake," she thought.

"Ask my mother if she will not come up and sleep with me to-night; I am not well," she said to Sophie.

She put her hat and shawl where she could get them without striking a light. She buttoned a white loose wrapper over the clothes she had worn through the day and lay down, as though undressed.

Presently Mrs. Gonzalis came in and spoke to her. Kildee answered pleasantly. Her tone deceived the woman. "She has yielded," she thought. "Carleon has brought her round."

She undressed and lay down beside Kildee.

"And so my dear girl has reconsidered, and will act for her own and her mother's happiness?" she said presently, and at the same time she put her arm over Kildee. The girl did not answer. She restrained the impulse to reply as her heart prompted, but she could not bear that embrace. She felt herself shuddering at its serpent suggestion.

"Please take your arm off," she said faintly. "It makes my breathing difficult."

The arm was removed and Mrs. Gonzalis turned over. Presently she seemed to be asleep; and Kildee, who felt herself growing strangely drowsy, thought she had better secure the keys at once. She might not wake again at an opportune time if she allowed this occasion to pass. She rose softly, threw off the white wrapper, and began to search in Mme. Gonzalis's pocket for the keys that secured the gate and the boat. They were not there. She was sadly disappointed. She had been sure of finding the keys



and slipping out of the house through one of the windows below, the shutter of which was broken. As she lifted her vexed face from the vain search she encountered the sharp, black eyes of Mme. Gonzalis. The lady sat up in bed, watching her with a malicious half smile on her face.

“Mr. Carleon has the keys,” she said.

“He shall give them to me to-morrow, or I will enter complaint against him in court for detaining me here,” Kildee said.

A twinkle in Mrs. Gonzalis’s eyes seemed to ask, ‘How will you get to a court of justice?’ but she made no response.

Kildee sat by the window and looked out at the glistening, dewy leaves of the tall trees, and at the glimpses of misty moonlit sea she could catch between the foliage. But the feeling of drowsiness overcame her, and she crept back to bed. She lay there crying softly till she fell asleep with the tears undried on her lashes.

Such a deep sleep it was! She did not wake from it until the sun was high in the heavens. She started up; her head felt dizzy, her eyes swollen. Mme. Gonzalis was not beside her; she had dressed and gone.

“How late it must be!” thought Kildee. “How did I happen to sleep so soundly? Could it be that the tea was drugged?”

She almost lost courage at the thought that those about her would not hesitate to resort to such means to force her obedience to their wishes.

“Oh! it will not do for me to stay here another hour. I must contrive to climb over the iron fence in spite of the spikes. I will do it this very morning,” was her rapid resolve as she sprung from bed.

Her toilet was made in a few minutes; then she went to the door to open it. It was fast. The key was no longer on the inside. The door had been locked on the outside, and she was a prisoner in her room.



She stood for a short time reflecting on this new outrage. Then she beat upon the door loudly with her hands, calling to her mother and to Sophie, but there was no response. All was still below stairs. She ran to the window. The room was in the rear of the house; trees shut out the view; the walls descended sheer to the rock-paved ground, a distance of fifty feet at least.

In moving about the room her attention was attracted to a small table covered by a white cloth. She removed the cover, and found a neatly arranged breakfast, a trifle cold. On the table lay a note, which she unfolded and read:

“You will remain in this room until you consent to consult my reasonable wishes and your own best interests.

“YOUR MOTHER.”

“No mother of mine,” cried Kildee, trampling the note under her little foot. “I have felt it always; I know it now. No true mother would want her child to marry that man. Oh, if I had a good mother—like Lottie’s! But I have not even a friend. There is not one being in the world I have any right to apply to even if it were possible to send word of my situation here.”

She buried her face in her hands and gave way to tears. Only for a moment though; she sprung to her feet and threw back the mass of tangled hair, her dark eyes flashed resolutely.

“They shall never force me to do this thing,” she cried. “I will stay here a prisoner forever.”

There seemed little prospect of her getting away. She was shut up in an isolated house in the center of Aphrodite Island—a place under the ban of respectability, and never visited save at the rare times when Carleon invited a party of friends to be his guest. She was locked up in a room at the back of the building, situated in a story above the lower floor and the basement. Tall trees narrowed the view from the two windows so that she could not see or be



seen by any person who might visit the island or approach it in a boat. There was no way to reach the ground from the lofty windows. The sheets even had been removed from the bed; her trunk keys had been taken away that she might not tear her clothing in strips with the hope of making a rope long enough and sufficiently stout to bear her weight. Even if she should succeed in reaching the ground, it would still be impossible for her to leave the island. The gates of the grounds were locked, the boats were securely fastened.

Yet she did not despair, and not one thought of yielding crossed her mind.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

THE wharf at Wallport in the hot afternoon sun is not a very inviting place. Sloops and schooners, a few large ships, and a number of steam vessels are anchored in the harbor. Near the landing a steamer is discharging freight, another getting ready to "back out." Roustabouts in red shirts are darting to and fro like swarming bees. Boxes, bales, and barrels litter the wharf; peanut venders and hot-pie men cry their wares. And through the shouting, the puffing, the cursing, and the noisy laughter trickle the melancholy notes of a violin playing the funeral march in the seventeenth movement.

The performer is totally unconscious of the incongruity between his music and his surroundings--unconscious of the jeers of the ragged boys that dance around him and watch for an opportunity to seize by its tail the marmoset, Zach, that sometimes shyly peeps from the bosom of his gray woolen shirt.

It is St. Peter, Kildee's protégé, the daft "orchestra" of the Ducciole Company. When the troupe got ready to leave Rock Spring, after the sorrowful parting with Kildee, they missed St. Peter. Inquiries brought to light the fact



that he had followed Kildee, had climbed on the platform of the train that bore her away, and had been allowed a seat in the baggage-car. Arrived at Wallport he hunted up Kildee with dog-like instinct of devotion, and was making his way to her side, when she entered a carriage and was driven away. He ran after her, keeping the carriage in sight, and reached the wharf in time to see her seated with Mme. Gonzalis in a boat which a tall, blonde-bearded man was pushing from the shore. He strained his eyes after the boat until it disappeared in the gathering twilight, and then sat down on the sand and played the funeral march with tears rolling down his blank, bewildered-looking face.

He took up his abode on the wharf. He slept at night on a cotton bale; the boat hands and wharf boys gave him stale peanuts and apples and sometimes bread and cheese in return for his music. When the tall, yellow-haired Russ came from the island for the marketing St. Peter would follow him, and on his return to the wharf, where he had left his boat locked to the pier, the poor creature would beseech Goff by signs and inarticulate entreaties to take him in the boat. After being repulsed several times he lost heart, and would only watch the Russian's departure with wistful looks. He made his way to the wharf every day, though now he was partly lodged and fed at the Charity Home. Mayor Heathcliff had taken him there in his carriage one day, when, faint with the heat and want of food, he had dropped, like a limp bundle, across a cotton bale, just as the mayor was stepping from his carriage to meet some arriving friends.

Dreamily as he played on this sultry afternoon the player kept a watchful, wistful eye upon the island boat, as it lay softly rocking on the gentle swell near the water's edge.

A storm was coming up (the same storm which Heathcliff and Miss Montcalm were watching from her window). Presently Goff came, hurriedly striding down to the land-



ing carrying his heavy basket. He did not see St. Peter, who got up and followed him, a crowd of boys at his heels.

Goff unfastened his boat, threw the chain and padlock into it with a clang, put his basket in place, and seating himself with his back to the shore, gathered up the oars with a quick movement and an apprehensive look at the rising clouds. He did not see St. Peter step in stealthily after him and take his seat in the stern of the boat, just as the little craft was pushed off.

The boys on the shore set up a chorus of shouts and laughter. Goff thought they were jeering at him because he was foreign, and he would not condescend to turn his head. He sat bolt upright and bent his strength to the oars.

He was several hundred yards from the shore before he discovered that he was carrying a passenger. He turned upon the saint with a wrathful imprecation, but the dull eyes met his in child-like appeal.

For half a minute he hesitated whether to turn around and carry St. Peter back to the mainland, and by so doing probably get caught in the gale, or whether to brave his master's wrath by taking the man to the island. He had received strict orders from Carleon to take no one to Aphrodite, and to let no one come inside the gates, and Goff obeyed orders with the unquestioning fidelity of a foreign servant, and one who, as a conscript, had had a taste of military discipline.

But another look at the threatening clouds decided him to keep on. Carleon would never know. He would put the crazy fiddler off upon the island, but would take care he should not get inside the gate. With another growl he turned to his oars, and did not speak again until he had run the boat's nose upon the sandy beach of the island.

Then as St. Peter got out and prepared to follow him, he shook his fist at him threateningly, commanding him to stay where he was. St. Peter came to a standstill and



stared with a vacuous smile into the frowning face of the Russian. Goff proceeded on his way, but when he reached the gate there was the daft fiddler pattering along close behind him.

He turned about and strode up to the intruder with wrathful gestures. Apparently, these had the effect of cowing their object, for he sat down on the ground and dropped his head upon his arms, which held the beloved fiddle in their embrace. Goff looked at him with hesitating pity for a second, and then proceeded to unlock the great iron gate and push it ajar to admit him and his big wicker basket.

Hardly had he got inside when he felt something shoot past him, and turning saw St. Peter running up the walk. He started after him, but the fugitive darted out into the shrubbery and began dodging and doubling about so actively as to baffle his clumsy pursuer.

The rain now began to fall, and Goff determined to carry his bundles and baskets into the house, then return to hunt up St. Peter.

But that personage was nowhere to be found. Tired and hungry Goff went around to the little peak-roofed cot among the trees which was tenanted by him and his wife. The rain was now pouring, and the air had grown chill.

A little fire of pine-wood was crackling merrily on the hearth, and beside it sat St. Peter, playing on his fiddle, and Goff's wife listening with delight, while a pot of smoking coffee, and plates of sliced brown bread and beef on the table added to the inviting character of the picture.

"What's the sense of turning him out in the storm," said the wife, "a poor, brainless one like him? His music makes me feel good. It takes me back to the old land. Let's give him a bite and a shelter to-night, and in the morning early you can carry him ashore and the master none the wiser."

Goff had a weakness for the fiddle and a deference for



his wife's judgment, so the daft musician was allowed to stay.

He rose at daybreak next morning and made his way to the house. All was silent, and he wandered around the building until he came to the great sycamore before the window of the room in which Kildee was confined. On the grass lay some fruit the girl had thrown out the day before, unable to eat it. St. Peter picked up a pear to regale his pet upon. While Zach munched his breakfast, his master took a seat at the foot of the sycamore with his back to the house and began to play. The notes were soft and slow, but Kildee, wakeful and unhappy, heard the familiar air. A wild hope leaped into her heart. The music sounded like St. Peter's. Could it be he? Were her friends near? She sprung from bed and ran to the window. She could see no one. Yes, there was Zach, sitting on his haunches chewing his pear with zest.

"St. Peter, St. Peter," she called in eager but cautious tones.

He started up from the ivy-muffled base of the tree, turned his face toward the house and looked around, then up. He saw her; the precious fiddle slid unheeded to the ground, and the poor creature, uttering the half-articulate cry—between a laugh and a sob, by which he expressed emotion, stretched out his arms to Kildee. She too held out her arms to him; then she shook her head and expressed by signs that she was a prisoner.

"They have shut me up here; I can not get away. Tell them to come and free me," she said, but he stared at her bewilderedly. It was plain he did not comprehend.

Then she tried to ask after her former friends.

Mr. Duck, Lottie, Max—were they here, were they in the city? She asked about each one separately, and he shook his head, but she could not tell if he meant to reply that they were not here, or whether the gesture was merely a token of non-comprehension.



“Yet they must be in Wallport or St. Peter would not be here. They may be looking for me. How will I let them know?”

She thought a moment, then an inspiration seized her. She caught up a peach from the table and held it out of the window.

“Zach, Zach,” she called.

The marmoset had recognized her before and had capered with delight when she spoke to him. As he caught sight of the red-and-yellow peach, he flung away the core of the pear and began to clamber up the ivied wall of the building. He climbed rapidly; in a little while he was in reach of her arm, and she seized the furry creature, drew him inside, and hugged him in her delight. He returned her caress, for he had loved her next to his master; but presently he held out his tiny paw for the peach. While he devoured it, Kildee carried out her idea. She had no scrap of paper in the room. Her little writing-desk, her books, pens and pencils had all been taken out the night before or in the morning while she still slept so heavily. But she had found a morsel of pencil in the grate, and with this she proceeded to write on the smooth, polished surface of a clean cuff, one of the pair she had laid out to put on that night she expected to make her escape from the island:

“TO THE MAYOR OF WALLPORT,—I pray you to come to my aid. I am a girl of innocent life, forcibly confined in a locked room on Aphrodite Island. Come and free me, and I will thank you on my knees.

“KILDEE.”

She did not know who the Mayor of Wallport was, but she was sure there must be some such official who might have power to protect her. She knew no one to apply to. She had seen Hazard Hall but a few minutes at Rock Springs, and had not understood even that he lived at Wallport.



She fastened the cuff securely around the marmoset's neck while he munched his peach. Suddenly he dropped it and grew fidgety. He had heard his master's whistle and understood the summons. Kildee gave him a parting squeeze and put him out of the window. She watched him anxiously as he scrambled down, and drew a breath of relief when she saw him leap into St. Peter's arms, for she had seen Goff approaching through the trees.

He came up to St. Peter and laid his arm roughly on his shoulder.

"Come along," he said gruffly. "You git away quick; you not want you head broke. Te master be up soon."

St. Peter tried to resist, but the Russian's stern way of speaking appealed to his habit of obedience, and he suffered himself to be pushed along, hugging his fiddle and with Zach safe in his usual refuge—the bosom of the saint's flannel shirt.

Shortly afterward Kildee heard the sound of oars; Goff was taking St. Peter back to the main shore. A deserted, lonely feeling overcame the girl for a moment, as she listened to the monotonous rhythm of the oars. Then hope revived. Her message was safe around Zach's neck. If Max and her other friends were not in Wallport, still there was a probability that some one would see the cuff around the marmoset's neck, have the curiosity to examine it, and take her message to the mayor.

"God grant it!" prayed the girl, worn out with anxiety, confinement, and solitude.

No one but Sophie had entered the room since it was first locked upon her, and Sophie had refused to open her lips in answer to any question. She came in twice a day with a tray of food. The first time the door opened—just widely enough to admit her—Kildee had quickly pushed her aside and flung herself into the opening, only to be caught in the iron grip of Goff, who stood guard at the door, and thrust back into the room.



Both the Russian and his wife believed Kildee to be a wayward, disobedient girl, who had once before run away from her mother and was bent on doing so again.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

THE morning wore on, and no Max came to the rescue, no Papa Duck, no mayor armed with authority to free her from her prison and protect her from her *pseudo* mother.

An hour or so later she again heard the sound of oars. Her heart beat wildly. Could it be her friends coming to her relief? It was only Goff returning, after having landed St. Peter on the wharf at Wallport.

There was nothing in the bare, stripped room to divert the girl—not a picture, not a book, not a piece of work. She had only to sit and brood over the situation in which the treachery of others had involved her. She walked the floor until she was ready to drop with weariness. There was a sound at the door; she heard the key turning, and stood still with throbbing pulses. The door opened. Sophie's broad, stolid face appeared behind a tray of luncheon, and behind her loomed up the tall, stout figure of Goff. Kildee turned sick with disgust and disappointment. She signed for the woman to put down the tray and leave her. Sophie pointed to a note lying on the tray and said:

“I was to wait for an answer.”

Kildee tore the note open and read:

“I know your situation, and, as a friend to you and a servant of the Divine Master, I ask an interview with you. I may be able to do you some good.

“JOEL GIBSON.”

“Tell him I will see him at once,” said Kildee, wondering why she had not before thought of this man, and of the probability that he was under the same roof with her. She had seen him enter the house with Carleon that same night



whose ending had found her a prisoner, but she supposed he had left next morning long before she woke from her unnatural sleep. She had not liked his face or his voice when he came with Mrs. Gonzalis in the character of her referee at Rock Spring. And yet she could not have told why. His face was benignant, fatherly, his voice sweet and persuasive, his appearance and manner eminently patriarchal.

“He can not be a bad man. I feel safer now I know that he is here,” she said to herself as she waited impatiently for his entrance.

He came at length. The very sight of his silvery flowing beard and kind smile disarmed her of her faint, lingering suspicion.

“You have not eaten your luncheon; shall we partake together?” he said, at the same time laying on her plate a freshly gathered white lily. She inhaled its delicate perfume gratefully. It brought a message of comfort, and she took her seat opposite her venerable-looking visitor with a smile on her lips and a color in her cheeks that had been so wan a little while before. He bent his patriarchal beard till it touched the plate and murmured a blessing; then he helped Kildee to cold chicken and claret, and talked pleasantly of matters and things in the outside world, while he discussed the luncheon with zest, and yet with good breeding. The Reverend Joel Gibson was a person of tact and good breeding. Had he not been born without the moral sense, he would have been a gentleman. He had good impulses occasionally, but they were like the legless birds of the Arabian fable; they never alighted. Sometimes when he had taken an extra mint-julip he would grow melancholy and repentant, would curse Carleon and his own indolent, self-indulgent nature that made him this man’s tool; but his repentance always stopped short of amendment. And it is not to be denied that he took a positive pleasure in humbugging his kind and in getting off upon



them any little job of intricate knavery, the lock of which defied picking.

He had entered zestfully into the job he had now in hand; it was "nice," it required skillful handling, and it turned upon a gift which he was secretly proud to possess, but never dared boast of or display, except in the slight degree which is called magnetism. This gift was the faculty of mesmerizing.

After the repast, the patriarchal Joel patted Kildee's brown head, saying, "Go and put your flower in some water, my child," and with his own white, plump hands he piled the dishes in the tray and spread the white towel over it. Then he drew two chairs near the window and sat in one of them, desiring Kildee to take the other.

"Now, my daughter," he said, "tell me all about this trouble—your side of the story, I mean. I have heard your mother's. I am an old friend of hers—knew her long before she was as old as you—knew you as a baby in her arms."

"Then she *is* my mother?" Kildee said, and the pained, disappointed tone of her voice could not be mistaken.

"Certainly she is your mother, and a very good mother she was, but poverty and trials and ill-health have made her a little hard and selfish, I am afraid. It is not to be wondered at, and you must not be too hard upon her because of it. She is influenced now more by the belief that she is acting for your good than by any desire to benefit herself. But never mind; I am here to listen to you first; afterward, with your permission, I will talk a little. Begin and tell me something of your life. Who is this Max who your mother imagines stands in the way of your acceptance of the rich and accomplished gentleman who seems to love you so dearly?"

Kildee began the story of her life, telling it as simply and briefly as she knew how. The venerable magistrate (Carleon's money had helped him to get the office, sat just op-



posite her; his deep-set, green-gray eyes fixed themselves upon her face; he gave little sighs of sympathy as she proceeded; presently his hand clasped one of hers and his face gradually drew nearer hers; his eyes seemed to her to dilate and grow luminous yet misty. He uttered little tender sympathetic comments now and then, and his right hand moved slowly, as though he were unconsciously brushing away a disturbing fly. Kildee found herself rambling strangely in her story, growing disconnected, and losing the thread, to pick it up with an effort that grew more difficult each time to make. In vain she struggled against the feeling; her senses, her will seemed floating away from her; she caught at them again and again, but the attempt to arrest them was futile. Her own voice grew dreamy to her ears; the face opposite hers swam in a mist; she could only see two large softly shining eyes that expanded and expanded till they seemed to drown her in their luminous sea. At length her voice died to a murmur, her white lids were half drooped and tremulous like lily buds on gentle undulating water.

Joel Gibson smiled and made a few more passes with his white, fat hand. Her lips ceased to move, her lids to tremble. A few more passes yet. She sat upright, motionless—a beautiful statue of marble.

“Kildee, go and bring me yonder lily,” he said under his breath.

She rose, walked straight to the table, took the flower he had given her from the glass and brought it to him.

“Now sit still,” he said yet lower. She seated herself in the chair, and he left the room, returning in a few moments with Mme. Gonzalis.

“There,” he said, smiling, pointing to Kildee; “you can prepare her for her wedding, if there is any adornment needed. You had better arrange her hair and put this flower in her curls; she will look more bride-like in the eyes of your two Russian witnesses. She will do anything I tell



her to do. She is passive in my hands. I control her through the magnetic spell," he went on, seeing Mrs. Gonzalis stand before the white, still girl, with a look of awe and remorse on her face.

"Oh, she looks death-like; I can not bear to touch her!" cried the woman.

"Death-like! Not a bit. See her light up now. Kildee, smile," he said, and the sweet, still lips of the statue parted radiantly.

Mme. Gonzalis began softly to smooth her curls, and fastened them back with the white flower. Then she fastened some fine, soft lace around her throat, with a pretty pin she took from her own collar. As she made, in this simple manner, the toilet of the unconscious bride, the tears dropped on her sallow cheeks. When she had finished, she put back a rebellious curl with a tender, lingering touch, and kissed the white forehead it had shaded.

"Forgive me, sweet child—God in heaven forgive me!" she murmured.

Then she turned to Gibson, who stood looking complacently at Kildee, his hands clasped on his capacious stomach.

"Will her eyes remain closed as they are now?" she asked.

"No, she will open them when I will her to, though they will have no speculation. She will speak, too, when I will her to speak. Have you never before seen a person mesmerized?"

"Yes," Mme. Gonzalis said, briefly. "But it seems dreadful for one to be married while in this blind, unconscious state."

"Women are usually blind when they marry," said the Rev. Joel, smiling, rubbing his white hands gently together. "Blind with love, or vanity, or greed of money and fine clothes. It is as well to be blind with one thing as another. Is the little one ready?"



“Yes,” said the woman, turning her eyes with difficulty from the painful fascination of the girl’s white, sweet face.

“Call Carleon then. The bride is no doubt impatient. And let the parlor be darkened, and the candles lighted, and the witnesses in places. I like to do things in style.”

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

MRS. GONZALIS re-entered the room alone.

“Carleon is in the drawing-room,” she said. “He is striding up and down like one possessed. I spoke to him but he did not seem to heed me.”

“He has one of his absent-minded fits,” said Gibson. “Well, we can’t wait on his moods. I want to have this thing over. I confess I feel a little nervous. So, we will go down to him, Madame Gonzalis. Kildee, we will go down.”

He put her hand beneath his arm and they went downstairs, followed by Mrs. Gonzalis. The blinds of the long drawing-room had been closed, the heavy curtains dropped and the candles lighted. Enough daylight struggled through and mixed with the artificial illumination to produce a weird effect. The pictures, the statues bore the semblance of ghastly life. Goff and his wife in their Sunday attire sat bolt-upright against the wall. Their faces wore a puzzled, half-frightened expression.

The master of Aphrodite looked like anything but a bridegroom. Habitually faultless in his dress, his neck-tie was now awry, his hair disordered as though he had thrust his fingers wildly through it in his rapid walk about the room. A battle was going on in the man’s soul; the dull, lurid glow in his eye betrayed it.

Joel Gibson looked at him doubtfully: so might a jackal eye his tiger comrade in a cage, uncertain what might be the stronger animal’s mood. But he said cheerfully, ex-



ulting in his having made good his word to render Kildee passive to his will:

“ Mr. Carleon, your bride waits for you.”

The master of Aphrodite wheeled and saw the white, statuesque girl. His own face grew as pale; he did not offer to approach her. Gibson waited a minute, then he said under his breath to Kildee:

“ Open your eyes and go to Mr. Carleon.”

She hesitated; a ripple as of troubled feeling passed over her face; her eyelids twitched, but did not uncloze. Gibson fastened his green eyes upon her and passed his hand before her brow once and again; then, in a yet lower tone, he repeated his command. Her eyes opened wide, but it was plain they were unseeing; their look was fixed and vacant. She moved slowly from his side and approached Carleon. Though her will was paralyzed by the magnetic influence, yet she seemed dimly conscious of what was happening to her, and feebly struggling to assert herself, as one does in a nightmare, a trance, or in a state of somnambulism.

Carleon stood looking at her like one under a spell. He did not move nor utter a word. The vague pathetic appeal of that unconscious face, with its fixed visionless gaze and troubled brow, gave point to the sword of remorse which was in his heart. On the other hand never had the beauty and sweet grace of the girl moved him so strongly.

Warred upon by two opposite emotions he stood still, his breath coming heavily, his eyes riveted on Kildee. Gibson walked to the window and peered through the blinds. He was fearful of being interrupted. The part he was playing was rather “ risky,” and Joel Gibson, Esq., had his respectable reputation to sustain. He became impatient; he walked back to the table, took up a book containing the marriage formula, and looked across at Kildee.

“ Give Mr. Carleon your hand,” he said.

A shiver passed over her; slowly, reluctantly, she



stretched out her hand. Carleon started when her cold little fingers touched his, then he grasped her hand—suddenly, with a fierce compression of his lips.

Gibson drew a breath of relief.

“We will proceed,” he said. “The ceremony will be brief. Here I hold in my hand the customary permit of the court, which authorizes me to unite Miles Carleon and Jasmina Gonzalis in marriage. Miles Carleon, will you take this lady, Jasmina Gonzalis, to be your wedded wife? Will you?”

“No.”

The monosyllable burst from him as though it were forced out by some powerful exertion of his will. He dropped the hand of the girl and folded his arms across his chest.

Joel Gibson let fall the book he held and stared at his patron in dumb amazement. A hysterical cry from Mrs. Gonzalis broke the silence.

“What the dingnation does this mean?” demanded Gibson, forgetting his patriarchal dignity.

“It means that this foul business is at an end. For this minute, at least, I’ve got the upper hand of the devil that possesses me, and I’ll make use of the mastery. Take your spell off the girl.”

“But,” remonstrated Gibson in an undertone, with a warning glance at the witnesses, “it’s all working right; the girl will answer as I will her to, and her mother, and the witnesses here—”

“Not a word. I have my foot on the fiend now, and if you tempt me, you hypocritical cur, I’ll strike you to the earth. Take your wicked spell off the girl this instant.”

Gibson advanced hurriedly, and made a few passes with a trembling hand.

“I can’t,” he whimpered, “I’m all unnerved. I’ve lost control over myself.”

Carleon stepped to a side-table, caught up a decanter of



brandy, poured out a glassful, and brought it to his frightened factotum.

“Drink it down, and get control of yourself quick, or ’twill be the worse for you,” he said.

Gibson gulped down the fiery liquor, and walked to the mantel-piece, followed by Carleon’s blood-shot eyes. After a moment or two he turned round and again approached Kildee. This time his efforts to remove the mesmeric influence proved successful. Her face changed from its death-like pallor, her lids closed, then flashed wide open. There was consciousness in her eyes.

Her quick, startled look took in the scene; the lighted room, the two servants in their holiday clothes, Joel Gibson behind the table with its open book, and Carleon standing at her side. Her dim, dreamy consciousness of what had been happening received its confirmation. Horror overspread her face; she turned to Gibson:

“Am I married to that man?” she cried, pointing to Carleon.

The anguish in her voice pierced Carleon to the heart. He did not wait for the magistrate to reply.

“No,” he said, “you are not married to me. The sacrifice was not permitted. Your own innocence saved you. You are free—free to leave this place when you will.”

“I will go now,” she said.

“Here is the key to the gate. Goff, you will row Miss Gonzalis to Wallport and get her a carriage. Bring down her luggage, you and Sophie, and take it to the boat.”

Then, as the servants obeyed, he turned to Gibson and Mrs. Gonzalis:

“You will leave the room,” he said, “I wish to speak to her alone before she goes.”

“Stay,” cried Kildee, detaining Mrs. Gonzalis, “Mr. Carleon can have nothing to say to me that you must not hear.”

“But I have,” he exclaimed roughly. “Go,” address-



ing Mrs. Gonzalis with imperative gesture, "I will humble myself in the sight of but one woman on earth." Then turning to Kildee, "You need not fear me," he said, "I would not touch you for the whole of Aphrodite Island."

He closed the door upon Madame Gonzalis. He walked the length of the room twice and stopped in front of Kildee. He was lividly pale; his arms were pressed upon his chest as though to keep in some struggling emotion.

"Child," he said, "I have done you a foul wrong. I tore you away from your friends by a villainous scheme; I brought you to this polluted place; I put you in daily association with a monster—a moral Caliban—myself. By a trick as black as Hades I would have bound your pure life fast to mine, only something, some power I can not understand, interposed. After all, there *must* be a God—for creatures like you. I have stamped a nightmare memory upon your young soul that you can never shake off. I have, it is likely, put a lasting stain upon your fair name, for but to set foot on this cursed island is to have the sleuth-hound of scandal at your heels forever thereafter. I deserve the hangman's rope; I deserve to have you send a bullet through my heart, and I beg you will do it. Take this revolver and kill me as you would a mad dog that had bitten you."

She looked at the weapon he thrust into her hand and laid it on the table before her. She was pale as she listened to his wild words, but she looked calmly, sadly, into his burning eyes.

"You are not fit to die," she said.

"Am I fit to live? Can I endure to live after this? I swear to you I never realized what I was until I saw that look of horror and loathing in your eyes. I never knew a good woman intimately in my life before. I have never known a mother or a sister. The uncle who raised me—brilliant, gifted being that he was—had had every drop of the milk of humanity in his nature turned into gall by dis-



appointment and wrong. He had been rich; he lost his fortune, his friends forsook him; the wife he idolized deserted him, thenceforth he became a bitter hater of his kind—a modern Timon. He recovered his fortune; he used the money for his own gratification; he adopted me chiefly, I think, to perpetuate through me his revenge on mankind. ‘Make them serve your interests or your pleasure, but despise them, for they are either false or weak’—this was his teaching. He had no faith in the honor of man or the virtue of woman. Such was my training; I have followed it out. Money bought me pleasures, flatteries. I cared for no more. To fill up the passing hour was all my aim. I have felt weariness, satiety, disgust, but never, I swear, such bitter self-humiliation as when I saw what an object of horror I was in your eyes—in the eyes of the one creature I have loved, the fair, sweet being I would give my life to make love me. I never felt how black I was until I came in contact with your whiteness. Now I realize—*everything*. There is a hell burning here in my breast that all the waters of yonder ocean can not quench. Live after this? Never; it is simply impossible. I will make a will this night after you have left me, and leave all my money to you, to do with as you please, then a bit of cold lead rids the world of one who never did it any good: and not a tear will be shed over his dead body. The parasites who have fed upon me have cared only for my bounty; in their hearts they have despised me.”

“I do not want your money,” Kildee said, “and it is cowardly to talk of taking your life. Live to retrieve the past. Live to wipe out the evil you have done with good. You say you have used your money for selfish gratification, use it now for a noble purpose—use it to make others better and happier.”

“It is too late.”

“It is not too late. God is still above us; evil and suffering are still upon the earth; strength and talent are



still yours. Use your gold and your good gifts to put down sin and to alleviate pain and poverty."

"Girl, don't preach to me: I despise cant. I don't acknowledge your God. I hold that piety is either ignorance or hypocrisy, that repentance is weakness. I am not repentant. I don't love goodness, I love *you*. I don't hate sin; I simply loathe myself because you loathe me—because I saw myself in the mirror of your eyes."

"It is God's work," said the girl. "He held up the mirror. It is repentance and you do not know it. You will turn from your old self with disgust; you will aspire to a better self."

He broke into a short, hard laugh.

"Do you know you are talking that stuff to a man with no more capacity in him for good than a burned out volcano to grow roses? Why, this very instant as I look at you with that tearful light shining in your sweet eyes and that young bosom heaving with emotion, I am tempted to call back my accomplice and make him finish his work—bind you to me by force as my wife—my slave."

"But you will not do it," she said, meeting his look with fearless, upraised eyes. "You will not do it. I am no longer afraid of you. Your better angel has spoken to you; you have stopped short; you have taken a step in the better way, you will not turn back. No, I am not afraid of you *now*."

How sweet and steady her voice was; what a light was in her eyes, shining through her tears! The strong man was moved; his lips trembled, his fierce, hot eyes grew soft. With a self-scornful gesture, he threw back his head:

"I'll not whine," he said. "I did not ask this interview for the purpose of playing on your sympathies—exciting your pity. I had another purpose in view. It was to tell you that I desire to do all in my power to make amends for the wrong I have done you. All the gold in the world



would not mend that wrong, but let it go as far as it will. You are going away—out into a world that is strange to you. You do not know how cold and hard it is; you will need money, and money, thank Fate, I can give you.”

He stepped to the inlaid escritoire, unlocked a drawer and took from it a large roll of bills and a long purse filled with gold.

“This is for the present only,” he said, as he laid the money on her knee.

She looked at it, and then at him, and softly shook her head. She gathered up the purse and the bills, took them to the escritoire and laid them in their former place.

“I will not take them,” she said. “I will not touch a dollar of your money, Mr. Carleon.”

“Kildee, are you in earnest?”

“I am indeed. I will take no money from you.”

He almost staggered to the mantel-piece; he clung to it and looked at her with agonized eyes.

“Child,” he said huskily; “for God’s sake be merciful. Don’t refuse me this one drop of consolation. Don’t let me have to think of you as going out into the world penniless, friendless because of me. I can offer you no reparation but money; don’t reject it. You will indeed drive me to self-destruction.”

Kildee grew very pale.

“Oh, Mr. Carleon,” she cried, “I would take the money if I could do it and not feel it was wrong. I can not take it.”

“Then how can I ever make amends to you?”

“You can do as I begged you just now. You can let me think that I have helped to change you. You can put your old life under foot and reach up to a nobler one—a life active and useful. Then your breast will no longer be filled with a burning pain. The burned out volcano will grow roses of hope and peace.”

In her earnestness of entreaty she had stretched out her



hands toward him; he caught them and crushed them against his breast.

“Will *you* love me if I do this?” he exclaimed; but he saw the quick change in her face; it recalled him to himself. He dropped her hands, and bent his head in abasement.

“Forgive me,” he said, pain and humiliation in his tones; “I meant, will you despise me less?”

“Ah! do not talk of *my* love or hate. I am only an ignorant, simple girl. You have talents, and education, and money; these, put to a noble use, would win you the esteem of the world, the love and gratitude of thousands of human beings.”

Before he could speak the door was thrown open; Mrs. Gonzalis entered hurriedly:

“There are three men at the gate waiting to be admitted,” she said; “what must be done?”

“Tell Goff to let them in.”

“Is it best to do this?” she remonstrated. “Goff says they seem to be persons in authority. Perhaps they have come to—”

“No matter what they have come for; let them in at once,” he said turning to Goff, who appeared at the door.

“Would to Heaven I had never come to this house,” she said hysterically. “I feel a presentiment that fate will overtake me here.”

Kildee went up to her.

“If you are my mother,” she said, looking earnestly into her face, “I want you to go with me and live with me wherever I may find a place for us to live. I—”

“She is not your mother,” interrupted Carleon. “That was another of my sins. I had her claim you and bring you here.”

“But she is the person who had charge of me when I was a child, and left me—I remember her well.”

“Yet she is not your mother. Your father is—”



“Hush!” cried Madame Gonzalis, sharply. “I told you that wild story to deceive you. You have no proof of it. I deny it.”

“Her face is proof enough. She is the image of—”

“Will you not be silent?” cried the woman. “Do you not understand?”

She made a swift step toward him and seized his arm with her slender fingers. “Do you want to destroy me?” she said under her breath. “If he is told that she is his child do you not know he will demand proofs? He will question me, search into my history; part of it is known to him already, only he thinks me dead. He would at once suspect; he would never rest until all was known, and I was brought to—”

“What?”

“The gallows!” she said in an intense whisper. “You suspected it before.”

His look of horror told that his suspicion hitherto had not been strong.

Goff threw open the door. “Mayor Heathcliff, Sheriff Tatem, Deputy-sheriff Lynn,” he announced.

Madame Gonzalis uttered a stifled scream and darted to the door. On the threshold she came face to face with Ira Heathcliff. Sudden recognition flashed into his eyes.

“Zulimee! *You* here?” he said.

She did not answer him. She made one deprecating gesture and fled past him. She ran to her room and threw herself on her bed, burying her face in her hands.

“That *he* should see me here!” she said with a spasmodic sob.

She rose and began hurriedly to collect her most valuable possessions and pack them in a portmanteau with a few articles of clothing. “I must get away from this place; away from this city,” she muttered to herself. “What evil spirit possessed me to come here?”

She caught up the portmanteau, though it seemed too



heavy for her slender arm, and left the room, the mansion, making her way to the boat-house. There she unfastened a small, light boat, and got into it. Taking the oars in her own hands, she pushed off from the island, looking back fearfully, and breathing more freely when she saw no one. Handling the oars with a skill acquired in her early life in Mexico, she was soon at a distance from the island. It was her object to reach the city in time to take the first night train going out in any direction, it little mattered where.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

CARLEON advanced and received his visitors with stately courtesy.

“This is an unexpected honor, gentlemen,” he said, with that mocking shade in his voice and in the expression of his handsome mouth.

“It is not a visit of pleasure or of friendship, Mr. Carleon,” returned the mayor.

“I presumed as much. I am waiting to hear you announce the business you have with me.”

“It is this, Mr. Carleon: I have received an intimation that a young girl was forcibly detained in this house—confined in one of the rooms. Is this true?”

“It is quite true. This is the young lady. She has been detained here against her will. She has been forcibly shut up in a room on the upper floor.”

“And you confess to this lawless, this disgraceful act?”

“I will give you further particulars. The young girl is as pure as she is lovely. I wanted to marry her. I induced a woman she thought to be her mother to bring her here. The girl had never seen me, knew nothing of my character. I came here a few days ago. I tried to win her love and consent to marry me. I failed, and not to be balked of my purpose, I resorted to stratagem. I procured a



marriage license and a magistrate. Half an hour ago Miss Gonzalis was on the point of marrying me while unconscious, through the influence of mesmerism. That she did not, is due to—circumstances which need not be detailed.”

Outwardly Carleon was coolly indifferent, almost flip-pant. Ira Heathcliff eyed him sternly.

“You surely know,” he said, “that you have laid yourself open to arrest and punishment at the hands of the law for this outrage.”

“I think it probable.”

“It is so probable that it will soon be an accomplished fact. I came provided with a warrant for your arrest. You have long defied the law, and escaped justice through chicanery and bribes.”

“It is a weak law than can be tricked; it is a poor law that can be bribed. But you will not find the matter of arrest so easy, Mayor Heathcliff. No man and no three men shall take me alive. I will defend my freedom with my life.”

As he spoke he took the revolver—a French hair-trigger—from the table and stepped backward a pace until his back was against the wall.

“It will be better for you to submit peaceably. When this young lady prosecutes you for—”

“I will not prosecute Mr. Carleon,” Kildee said. “And I hope you will not arrest him; he repents of what he has done; he wished to make amends; he is going to assist me to get away from here. It was of his own will that the marriage ceremony was stopped, through his own better feelings.”

“He does not look very repentant,” commented Heathcliff, eying the half-mocking, half-defiant face of the master of Aphrodite.

“But he *is* repentant,” Kildee said. “I have seen into his heart. I believe he will never act so wickedly again. I



believe there will be a change in his life. Do not hinder it, Mayor Heathcliff. Let him go free; I will not prosecute him."

Heathcliff gave her a searching look.

"You are willing then to stay here—to be his wife?"

"Oh, no, no! I ask you to take me with you to the city. I was going alone when you came."

"Well," the mayor said, after a pause, "it shall be as you say. I will not serve the warrant upon Mr. Carleon, though he has by his own confession been guilty of violence and fraud. But the magistrate who was your accomplice, Mr. Carleon—"

"You will not find him. And there is nothing to show that he knew the young lady was not conscious when he attempted to perform the ceremony."

"It is a strange affair—a dark affair," said Heathcliff. "I do not feel that it is right to let it rest, but for this young girl's sake it is perhaps better it should not be made public. My child," he went on, looking down at Kildee—"forgive me for calling you so; but you seem so young—in your appeal to me you signed only the queer little name, 'Kildee.'"

"It is all the name I have a right to—so far as I know. I do not know who my parents were. Call me Kildee, please."

"Kildee, shall we go?"

"Yes, sir; I am ready."

She put on the hat Sophie had brought down when Goff had carried her luggage to the boat.

The master of Aphrodite did not stir from his position beside the table on which he had laid the revolver. He stood, resting his hand lightly on the table, his attitude easy and self-assured. He bent his head in acknowledgment of the mayor's cold "good-evening," the shadow of a disdainful smile touching his handsome mouth.

Heathcliff and his two officials passed out; Kildee stayed



behind an instant. She looked hesitatingly at Carleon; her face flushed and paled. She spoke at length, a thread of tremor running through her voice:

“Good-bye, Mr. Carleon. I—I shall pray for you.”

The haughty composure of his face broke up at once.

“Spare your prayers,” he said. “They are useless. The two things I crave can never be mine—peace and—your love. But—Kildee—can you say that you forgive me?”

“I can, I do. May Heaven forgive you and send you peace.”

Her lips trembled, but she did not touch his hand that he had stretched toward her. She waved her own little hand in token of farewell, and quitted the room.

He dropped into a seat and buried his face in his hands. Presently he heard the sound of oars. He raised his head, listened and went to the window. Throwing open the blind, he saw in the red, slanting light of the low sun, the boat containing his late visitors standing out from the island beach. He saw Kildee’s pretty figure seated in the stern; the little gray hat he had two days ago thought such a perfect shade to the delicate, merry, yet earnest, soulful face. His mouth worked with strong emotion.

“Lost! lost to me forever,” he groaned. “I might have made her love me if I had been a man. But the brute crept out. She pities me, but she would not touch my hand. I am loathsome to her. No wonder; I am loathsome to myself.”

He started up, he dashed his clinched fist against his forehead.

“Fool! Dotard!” he exclaimed, “to let myself be so unmanned. And for what? Because an ignorant, puritanic girl chooses to think me a creature to be despised? What does her opinion matter? What does any woman’s, any man’s opinion matter? A contemptible herd! The world is wide, and I have money in plenty. While it lasts



I can go on buying the smiles of beauty at all they are worth, buying flatteries and followers and excitements. I can take the steamer to-morrow for the Continent. I can go to Paris, to Vienna; there to do what? Begin again the old round of feverish pleasure-seeking, only with a heart grown older, wearier, bitterer? It sickens me to think of it. And I should see that girl's eyes everywhere, with that look of loathing in them. Great God! is there no ease, no rest?"

His hand fell heavily on the table as he stopped beside it in his walk. His fingers struck against the revolver; he seized it and put its muzzle against his temple—then he lowered it and looked down its bore.

"That drop of cold lead would quench the brain-burning," he said.

" 'No life lives forever,  
Dead men rise up never.' "

"I believe that, yet I have not courage to test it. 'It is cowardly to take one's own life,' said that little thrilling voice. But how to live on! how to endure this fever of living!"

He grasped the decanter of brandy and poured out a full draught. He raised the glass to his lips, but suddenly he flung it from him, shivering it against the grate. "I will not deaden my brain by any such coarse anodyne," he exclaimed; "let the devils tug at it as they may."

He threw himself into a chair and sunk his head between his hands. Hot tears fell from his eyes. His strong nature struggled and suffered strongly. The women he had wronged in his life, frivolous beings though they may have been, were avenged through a woman. Love, which he had mocked at, made him feel its power and truth. Thus fate works out her revenges.



## CHAPTER XXV.

WHEN they were outside the door, Heathcliff turned to the officers who had accompanied him:

“Pardon me, gentlemen,” he said, “for taking the lead in this. I know Carleon well; I have some little influence over him. I saw his mood at once. He is in a high state of excitement. His coolness is put on. That acknowledgment of his wrong-doing would never have been made but in the white heat of excitement. I did not want to press his mood.”

“All the same, he deserves to be called to account,” said Tatem, gruffly. “Even if that girl does not appear against him, we have his own confession that he brought her here by fraud, confined her by force, and was on the point of tricking her into marrying him. Such lawless proceedings ought not to go unpunished.”

“That is true; action can still be taken in the matter. My wish just now was to avoid further irritating a desperate man. For that child’s sake it would be best not to make the affair public, but justice should take its course. I believe the girl to be innocent, and investigation will not hurt her with right-feeling people.”

“What the devil,” said the blunt Tatem, “did that fellow Carleon mean by cutting up so about the matter of arrest? The arrest would amount to nothing. He would give bond for his appearance at court, and when the trial came on his money would get him off scot-free. It always has. What possessed him to bluster in that style about being arrested?”

“I don’t know. It is not like Carleon to bully. He is brave to recklessness, but he is no bully. It occurs to me he wanted to invite violence, that he might do some des-



perate act—shoot one of us and get shot, or turn his bullet against himself. He was worked up to such a rash mood by disappointment, perhaps by remorse. The girl said this, you remember.”

“Carleon remorseful!” exclaimed young Lynn, with a scornful laugh.

“But it is true,” said a soft voice behind them. Kildee had come out on the porch and stood there unperceived. “He is in a fearful state of remorse; he talked of killing himself, but I do not think he will. I am so glad you did not arrest him. He had put a strain on himself and it would have given way if he had been provoked. He might have done something terrible to you or himself.”

“We will leave him alone for the present,” Heathcliff said. “I see you are ready, Kildee; let us go.”

On the way to the beach the sound of a violin caught Kildee’s ear. She looked and saw a familiar figure seated in the boat—St. Peter in his gray blouse and funny skull-cap, which some foreign sailor had given him. His long, gray locks were blowing in the wind, his vacant, melancholy eyes were turned in the direction of the house. A gleam of delight leaped into them when he saw Kildee. He rose up and began to nod his head and play with such animation that Zach crept out of his usual hiding-place and began to caper on his master’s shoulder in enjoyment of the music, and anticipation that it would call forth some tangible demonstration from the listeners, such as peanuts and gingerbread.

He sprung into Kildee’s arms the moment she came near. St. Peter, hugging his violin with one arm, caught hold of her dress and looked with wistful joy into her face, uttering broken words, void of sense, but full of happy significance.

Kildee, laughing and half crying, hugged Zach and patted St. Peter’s shoulder, put the unkempt locks out of his eyes and buttoned the collar of his woolen shirt.



“So this queer pair are friends of yours,” the mayor said. “I wondered what made the old fiddler so persistent to come with us. There was no keeping him out of the boat.”

“He had seen me at the window when I was a prisoner in the little upper room, and he has sense where his feelings are concerned, poor dear,” said Kildee.

“You know him well then?”

“Oh! he belonged to us. He was our orchestra. We were all fond of him and he of us, but he liked me best. He must have stolen away from them and followed me, when they took me away from my friends.”

“Who are these friends?”

“They are named Duck—such a homely name that Papa Professor—he taught Shakespeare and the ballet—changed it to Ducciole when we went to travel.”

“You went out then as a Dramatic Company?”

“It was just our family, Papa and Mamma Duck—I called them so—and Lottie, their daughter, and their two sons. Yes, and a young musician and scene painter, named Max Rubin.” Kildee uttered the name in a lower tone.

“We picked St. Peter up wandering in the street; rather I did him a little good turn, and he followed me home and has been attached to me ever since. He plays wonderfully on the violin; don’t you think so? and he is very good and gentle, only sometimes he gets angry and then he is a perfect lion. But I can always tame him; he always listens to me,” Kildee added, caressing the lion’s shaggy mane.

“Were those theatrical people related to you?”

“No, I wish they were, they were all so good. I have no kin that I know of. A woman, who said she was my mother, had charge of me when I can first remember. She left me in a lodging-house when I was seven years old, and I was found by a young man—the artist, Max Rubin—who I told you belonged to our troupe. He took care of me for a time, and then the Ducks adopted me as their child. I



have lived with them ever since, until, a few weeks ago, the woman who claimed to be my mother took me away and brought me here."

"And this woman was not your mother?"

"No; Mr. Carleon told me she was not, just a few moments before you came."

"Then this was the lady I met going out of the room as I entered—Mrs. Gonzalis. It was she who claimed to be your mother?"

"Yes. You seemed to recognize her. You have known her before?"

"I had known her before—years before," answered Heathcliff, his eyes clouding with the shadow of a memory. "She had no daughter then. I feel sure you are not her child."

"Oh! I always *felt* she was not my mother, but I was glad to *know* it."

"Did Carleon tell you who were your parents?"

"No; he seemed about to tell me something that Mrs. Gonzalis had told him, but she interposed and said the story was not true, that she had deceived him."

Heathcliff looked earnestly at the girl's face. The breeze had blown back her hat, and the mellow light of the low sun was full on her broad brow and clear-cut, high-bred features. Who did she remind him of? Some face, it seemed, he had lately seen—but whose?

"Mrs. Gonzalis left the house shortly after I entered it," he said presently. "I saw her from the window, crossing the bay in a little skiff—rowing herself. I recognized her figure. Do you know which way she went?"

"I did not know she had left the island. She said a little while ago that she repented ever having come, and seemed restless and uneasy."

"It is probable that she will leave the city on some train that goes out to-night," mused Heathcliff. "Two trains left at five; she did not reach the depot in time to take



either of these. Two express trains leave at eight; it is probable she will take passage on one of these." Then he added to himself: "I must see her before she goes."

Mayor Heathcliff studied the girl's face well during the row from the island to the main-shore. The result of that study and the pathos of her simply told tale stirred interest and sympathy in his breast.

They reached the landing just as the sun—a great red globe—dropped behind the roofs and steeples of Wallport. The mayor dismissed the two officers who had accompanied him, with thanks for their services and a request to meet him in the office next day when it would be decided what should be done in the affair at Aphrodite Island. Then he turned to Kildee:

"What will you do?" he asked of her.

"I will thank you from my heart for your kindness, and say good-by," she answered, holding out her hand.

He took it and felt that it trembled. Her little face was quite pale. The noisy, motley, elbowing, careless crowd on the levee made her courage falter. This was the world in which she was to push her way to a place. She held fast hold of St. Peter with one hand; behind her walked a boy with her little trunk. The mayor had had no intention of leaving her unprotected. He drew her hand through his arm.

"My carriage is waiting for me close by," he said. "Let me put you down at the place you wish to go to."

"I have no place in my mind. I am strange to this city. I have no friend here."

"Shall I take you to the house of some good lady friend of mine; or to my own house—I have a pleasant old house-keeper—until you can look about you and decide what you will do, or write to your friends?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know where they are; and I have no money to go to them. No, Mr. Heathcliff; I would like to go to work to earn my living. I would like to go at once."



He smiled at her earnestness and at the business-like look on her little face.

“At once?” he repeated, signing toward the sunset sky. “‘The night cometh when no man can work,’” he quoted; “nor little woman either. What kind of work would you like?”

“Any I can do. I am not accomplished. I can not do anything that requires culture. I can read pretty well, and I write a good plain hand, and I know enough of figures to cast up simple accounts, that is all. But I can sew, and trim, and make pastry and cook it, and I can do house-work and nurse the sick.”

“Why, you are accomplished, after all,” said the mayor smiling. “I think we can find you a place. There is a nice old lady of my acquaintance who keeps a little fruit and flower shop. Her husband is a kind-hearted, crochety old fellow; he raises flowers and rabbits in a tiny square of garden not much bigger than a bed-quilt, back of the shop. They sleep above the shop and the place up there looks attractive from the outside, with its balcony and bird-cages and flowering plants. A day or two ago, Madame Jean told me her rheumatism made it so bad for her to stand that she must give up her business or get an assistant. I advised her to get a good, smart girl to help her, and she shrugged her plump shoulders, and said girls, both good and smart, were scarce as blackberries in December.”

“I am afraid she will not think I am that rare combination,” Kildee said.

“We’ll risk it,” the mayor answered, and he called to the coachman and bade him drive to Mme. Jean’s fruit shop on Main Street.

Kildee looked out of the window, seeing the city sights in brilliant panorama as the carriage bowled over the well-paved streets, yet scarcely noting what she saw, for her thoughts were busy with other things. Suddenly she turned to Heathcliff.



“There’s St. Peter,” she said; “my poor comrade here; what will be done with him? Where has he been staying?”

“Part of the time at the Charity Home in this city. I carried him to that institution. But they tell me he will not stay there—strays off every day, usually to the wharf.”

“He would not stray away from me,” Kildee said. “He was restless because he was looking for me. If I could obtain this place at the fruit shop, would it be possible to get St. Peter in there too? He is harmless and he eats very little, and he plays beautifully, and Zach, the marmoset, turns somersaults and dances. It would attract custom to the shop, would it not?”

“I think so,” the mayor said, inwardly smiling at her earnestness and simplicity. “Yes; I fancy that St. Peter’s accomplishments, topped by Zach’s, would prove a drawing card.”

He said to himself that if Mme. Jean did not regard it in that light, he would privately pay the daft fiddler’s board at her establishment and St. Peter’s independent little guardian none the wiser.

“Here we are,” he said at length, as the carriage stopped. Kildee looked out and saw two large shop-windows already lighted up, displaying prettily arranged fruits and candy jars, interspersed with pots of flowering plants. She had a glimpse of a lighted interior, with a tinted paper on the wall, well-filled shelves and hanging baskets and bird-cages.

Kildee made St. Peter understand that he must wait outside the door while she went with the mayor inside.

“That is Madame Jean,” Heathcliff said, as they stopped just across the threshold, beside the cage of a pair of lovely Jamaica sparrows. He pointed to a short, plump old lady, in a lilac-flowered muslin with wide sleeves looped up, a fresh complexion and crisp gray curls. She was arranging cut flowers in a basket for a customer who was standing



impatiently watching the process. A tiny, shaggy black spaniel with an old solemn face, gray-whiskered and one-eyed, sat on the counter gravely eying his mistress's proceedings.

Mme. Jean was evidently hurried and nervous. Her little plump hands made awkward movements; the flower stems were refractory, the foliage and vine-sprays rebellious.

"Angeline," called a plaintive voice from within. "Am I not to have any tea? This toast is choking me."

The stem of a superb Maréchal Neil rose snapped off short in Mme. Jean's hand. She gave a quick movement, and evidently a rheumatic twinge assailed her, for she bit her lip and her rosy color ebbed. She pushed flowers and basket from her.

"It is onpossib' to fill your ordare, sir," she said. "We have no flower-baskets to-day."

"But you promised, and I have been waiting all this while. This is a nice way to serve an old customer."

She waved her hands outward and made a mock bow.

"You are at libertee to tak your custom otter way, monsieur," she said.

"I wish she would let *me* arrange the flowers," Kildee said in an undertone to the mayor.

He stepped forward, holding her hand.

"Good-evening, Madame Jean. Can I get some purple figs for my cream this evening? Not now; presently when you are at leisure. I want to try once more to make friends with Hugo, this most dignified of dogs. Meantime, I have a little friend here who thinks she can make that basket look all right. Will you let her try, while you go and give your good husband his tea?"

The Dutch-doll face lighted up.

"Ah, my friend, you are good—always good. Tee leetle one s'all try her hand at tee basket, reet welcome."

She bowed, smiling, and went into the inner room. Kildee took the basket and began the work of arranging the



flowers in it. Heathcliff watched her deft fingers interweaving flower-stems, adjusting sprays and twisting vines about the basket-handle. The impatient customer began to look well pleased as he saw the basket growing into a thing of beauty.

"Does it come to you by instinct, this sort of thing, as nest-building comes to a jenny wren?" asked the mayor when the last graceful sprays of smilax were added to the mass of bloom and fragrance.

"I have done this often and often," said Kildee. "Fixed baskets, you know, to be sent to us on the stage."

"As complimentary homages from an admiring audience," Heathcliff said.

She nodded, then looked up and caught his quizzical smile, and blushed.

"It was by way of advertisement," she said. "Papa Professor said it was all square, and he wouldn't do anything that was not fair."

Mme. Jean came from the inner room just as the tall young man received his basket, and was saying to Kildee:

"Here's the old lady's two dollars, and a quarter over, which you have a right to pocket, my little maid. It's the prettiest basket I've ever seen."

"The flowers were so lovely," Kildee said, disclaimingly. She put the money into Mme. Jean's hand, shaking her head, smiling, but firm, when that lady insisted on her accepting a silver half-dollar.

"Ah, if one could get *une petite*, so nice and handee, to asseest in tee shop!" said madame.

"The *petite* is at your service, Madame Jean," returned the mayor. "Behold in me the fairy godfather who brings you the treasure you so much coveted—a treasure, scarce, you declared, as Christmas blackberries—a good and smart girl to help you."

"Ah!" Mme. Jean became instantly critical. She put on her gold-rimmed glasses and inspected the girl as she was



wont to do the fruit she bought of the wholesale dealer, spying for specks and bruises.

“She look ver’ tendre, deelicate,” she said.

“But she looks healthy and she looks good, and she is smart, as you have seen,” said the mayor, quite diverted.

“Looks weel tell lie, Monsieur le Maire; looks weel tell lie,” said the little fat doll, sententiously. Then she added: “We s’all see how Hugo likes her. Hugo haf more sense as men. Here, Hugo.”

She put the fluffy black morsel on the counter and said to him:

“Hugo, ees Ma’m’selle—w’at s’all I say?”

“Kildee,” said the mayor.

“Keeldee! Ah, tees Americaine name! Hugo, s’all Ma’m’selle Keeldee be friends weet us?”

The namesake of the great poet cocked his head on one side and scrutinized Kildee. A look of grave suspicion was in his one eye. Kildee could not help smiling. Hugo drew himself up as though to intimate that he was not to be biased in his judgment by such cajolery; at length his expression relaxed in its severity; he held out his paw; Kildee shook it, laughing.

“Hugo approves of her,” said Heathcliff, who had enjoyed the little Frenchwoman’s test.

Mme. Jean nodded and signified her indorsement of Hugo’s opinion by patting Kildee’s shoulder. Mme. Jean’s husband now came in, a little dark person with olive skin, crinkled with fine wrinkles, keen black eyes, and curly iron-gray hair. He wore a red-flowered dressing-gown and a black velvet cap with a tarnished tassel. Kildee’s love of the picturesque was gratified by his looks. She thought the two a quaint and charming pair.

The mayor presented Kildee to M. Jean, and madame informed him that she thought of taking the girl as assistant and that Hugo had shown himself satisfied with her.

St. Peter, meanwhile, tired of standing outside with his



back against the wall teased by his usual torments, the boys, had taken his seat on the door-step and now began to play.

“Hist!” said M. Jean, holding up his hand. “Tat ees music.”

St. Peter was playing a lively waltz, and the people began to gather in front of the door to listen. Kildee, anxious to show off her protégés, gave a little, low whistle, and Zach, who had been peeping from his hiding-place in the saint’s shirt-bosom, popped out and began to dance. The crowd in front of the door thickened; M. Jean clapped his hands in delight.

“I like to hire tee fellow shust to play for me,” he said.

“He would bring tee people,” said practical madame, preparing to answer a demand for candy and peanuts from boys who wished to see the marmoset eat.

“He is an old friend of Kildee’s,” said the mayor; “and insists on staying where she does. He is half-witted, but harmless as a child. Could you find a cuddy hole for him to sleep in?”

“*Certainement*,” assured monsieur. “We weel tak ’em, we weel tak bof all tree. Come here, *petite*; w’at can you do?”

“I can make flower-baskets and sell oranges, monsieur.”

“Ah, tat is in madame’s line. You like to teend roses and peenks, eh?”

“Dearly, monsieur.”

“You can sing?”

“Pretty well.”

“And dance?”

“Ah, yes!”

“And make tea?”

“I can do that best of all.”

“*Très bien!* You do for me eexact. She weel mek tee old folks merry, eh! Angeline?”

“It is not better to be so merry,” said the doll didactic-



ally, but she smiled kindly at Kildee, as she filled numerous brown paper bags with fruit and candy for the customers. St. Peter's music had enticed into the shop.

"And now for my figs and oranges," said Heathcliff.

While she was putting them up, she asked:

"Haf *la petite* any people—*relation*?"

"None, she is alone in the world. She has become separated, through no fault of hers, from the friends who brought her up."

"She is bout so old as Rosie would haf been—*ma pauvre* Rosie," said Mme. Jean, her eyes growing wet as she looked at the girl, who was talking to delighted M. Jean. "She might haf Rosie's room; nobody haf sleep tere since Rosie taken away. Monsieur le Maire, I weel tak tee lee-tle one; *mais* I can pay her but tree or four dollar a week and her board."

"Very well; I care more for getting her a home and occupation than anything else. And about her friend, the old musician. If you can give him lodging and food, I will see that you are paid for it."

"It is all reet, Monsieur le Maire," said madame, nodding until her little gray curls quivered.

"You are regularly installed here if you wish it, little maid," said the mayor, turning to Kildee. "And now," he added, to cut short her thanks, "you shall have your heart's desire—'work at once.' Come, sell me the prettiest bouquet you can pick out."



## CHAPTER XXVI.

PEOPLE in general called Heathcliff cold. Society ladies who had tried in vain to entice him to dinner-parties spoke of him as a "mere money-making machine," political cliques that had failed in their effort to use him characterized him as a "hard-headed cuss," enthusiastic spinsters whom he had treated brusquely when they urged him to contribute to refurnishing the church altar and draping the pulpit in sky-blue, to match the color of the young minister's eyes, voted him a stingy curmudgeon. But you would not find this verdict indorsed in the poor quarter of the town, or by the better laboring class. They would tell you that Heathcliff was an inflexible business man, strict in his dealings, exacting the fair day's work for the fair day's wages, frowning sternly upon dissipation and laziness; but they would tell you also that when sickness or accident brought want into their homes, the trouble was often lightened by the money and even the personal attendance of the so-called haughty mill-owner.

But it was seldom that Heathcliff's interest and sympathy had been so stirred for any one as for the girl he had found upon Aphrodite Island. Such a friendless young creature, so earnest and simple, so child-like, yet with a certain dignity and practical wisdom that the mayor thought very quaint. There was no common blood in her veins; he felt sure of this, and one of his reasons for wishing to find Mrs. Gonzalis was to try and get from her the secret of the girl's parentage. This was in his mind when he hurried to the depot after leaving Mme. Jean's fruit shop.



It wanted but half an hour to eight. Two trains for different roads were under the great turtle-shaped dome of the lighted depot waiting to have their engines attached. Heathcliff went into the ticket-office and drew the young agent aside.

“Dyke,” he said, “have you sold a ticket in the last hour to a lady, unattended; graceful, slender shape; dressed in black; a brunette; very handsome though faded, and wears a veil?”

“Yes, I sold a through ticket to St. Louis to just such a woman about half an hour ago. Shouldn’t remember, may be, only she hadn’t money to pay for the ticket in full and wanted me to take a ring—turquoise, I think, she said—for the rest. Of course I didn’t, though the ring was worth more, I expect, than the balance. She went off and realized on it somehow, I reckon, for she came back and bought the ticket. She is in the car next the sleeper; I saw her go in.”

Heathcliff made his way to the car, and walking through it soon discovered the object of his quest. The evening was very warm, and she had thrown her veil back, and leaned against the open window, seeming faint or fatigued. A white, weird beam from the electric illumination outside struck across her face. Heathcliff stopped and looked at her for a second. This was the face that had nearly crushed his life when that life was in its early bloom. Cruelly changed, but lovely still! He stepped nearer to her, still unnoticed, and bent over:

“Zulimee!”

She started and turned a wild, frightened look upon him. Her hand went at once to her heart.

“Is it you?” she panted. “How you startled me! I thought—I mean, I was not expecting to see *you*.”

“Nor desiring to see me,” he said, seating himself by her.



“No; why should I? I do not desire anything that makes me look back. I live only for the day. And we are never glad to see one we have wronged.”

“I have forgiven the wrong you did me, Zulimee. It was a hard blow at first, but it did me good in one way. It destroyed crude illusions and cooled my boyish blood. I owe my worldly success to it in a measure. From the furnace and the sledge blows of that trial my soft iron came out steel.”

“I am glad if any good came out of the evil. But no thanks were due to me. The deed was one of the many I don’t like to think over. I, a woman, ripened by fiery experiences, set myself to winning a boy’s fresh heart through mere feverish restlessness and desire to drown reflection. But God knows I never meant it to go so far. I never thought it could hurt you as it did; I never dreamed you could care for me so, you were such a boy.”

“Love ripens a boy’s heart fast enough—particularly a romantic, inexperienced boy such as I was. And you were so lovely! Do you know it is just twelve years yesterday, since I saw you first—that summer afternoon when I walked in the woods on the Orran River, wrapped in a dream, that was broken by the gallop of a runaway horse. In another moment I saw you clinging to the oak limb you had grasped when your horse ran under it—hanging there by your white arms in a cloud of loosened hair. How beautiful you were!”

“For God’s sake don’t recall it. Don’t recall *anything*. That beauty was my curse. But for it I might be sitting to-night by a happy hearth, instead of going out under the shadow of darkness, where I don’t know, nor care—a wretch, forsaken of God and man, with not one tie, nor one hope on earth.”

Her low tones were tense with feeling, they went to Heathcliff’s heart. He was moved to say:

“Zulimee, you have a near tie. Your son—the child



you once spoke of to me, and wept so—your child lives.”

“You have seen him?” she asked, breathlessly.

“Yes; you remember that on that bitter day when you told me you had only played with me, you said you had no love to give, it was all crushed out, and there was nothing but a wild longing for your child that had been taken away from you. You gave me then all the clew you had as to what had been done with your child. I followed up that clew—I found the boy at last, in good hands—but you had disappeared. A few years later, the boy also disappeared. I lost sight of him until not two years ago, when I met him face to face and knew him by his likeness to you. After circumstances confirmed me. He lives, you can see him to-night—this hour.”

“Ah—He is here!” Her breath came short; her hand clutched her heart. “Is he well?—is he happy?”

“He is in full health—buoyant, ambitious. Men predict his success. Will you see him?”

“I—will—not see him now—nor ever.”

“Why?”

“Can you ask? Do you not *feel* why I can not see my boy—and have him—*blush for his mother?*”

Her features quivered convulsively; then, as the tears came, she said, softly:

“My sweet boy—my beautiful! Oh, I was innocent when I last held him in my arms!”

She wrung her thin, ungloved hands together and looked at Heathcliff with burning eyes.

“Ira Heathcliff, why did you come here to torment me? Was this all you sought me for? Only to recall that past I try to trample upon and bury out of sight! Talk of something else. I thought, when you came, you wanted to ask me about that island affair. Tell me, have you taken the girl away from there?”

“Yes; she is with good people who will care for her.”



“Thank Heaven for that! Oh, I wronged that poor child! Would to God I could make reparation!”

“Will you tell me about her? She is not your child, I know. How did you come by her? Who are her parents?”

“I can not tell you.”

“You will not make her that much amends?”

“I *can not*, I tell you. Fear keeps me from it—fear stronger than the fear of death. In my last hour I will tell whose child she is—not till then.”

The train began to move. Heathcliff flung the package of fruit and the flowers he had bought at Mme. Jean's into Zulimee's lap; he wrung her hot, slender hand, and left her.

She buried her burning face in the cool flowers; a piece of paper touched her cheek; she drew it out and held it toward the lamp. It was a bank-note for five hundred dollars. She burst into tears.

“Oh! I wish he had not given it,” she said to herself. “It hurts me to take money from him. He was so true and grand, even as a boy—and I did him such a cruel wrong.”

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

WHILE the train that bore the beautiful, miserable woman away from the sea-side city was rushing on in darkness over marsh and lagoon and cypress swamp, the boy who had Zulimee's midnight eyes, and long curled lashes and low brow shadowed by rings of black hair, sat at his familiar post—the window of the dilapidated building he had rented to forward his investigations into the Red House mystery. He sat in the darkness—he never lighted a lamp, or allowed any sign of occupation to be seen about the



house—and looked across the intervening space over the tops of the olive and magnolia-trees, to the window of that room which he called the penetralia of the Sphinx. He could see but the one window, the other was hidden by foliage—and the blinds of this were most often closed—always in the day. Sometimes, however, they were open, and a white curtain fell across the window in their stead. On this curtain he had more than once seen the shadow of that graceful shape.

One night he had watched her putting up her hair; had seen the shapely bare arms lifting and twisting the mass of long tresses which he fancied were dark gold in color.

Sometimes he had found the window open, but the room unlighted, and had heard the mysterious mistress of the sanctum talking to her birds and trilling little snatches of song to encourage them to sing.

“Fancy that deformed hag possessing such a voice,” he said, as he listened to the delicious sweetness of the notes.

The pursuit of this shadowy enigma became intensely fascinating to the young reporter. No Romeo anticipating an interview with his Juliet, no enthusiast in astronomy on the verge of solving a celestial problem ever looked forward to the coming of night more anxiously than did this youthful *attaché* of “The Rattler.” He did his day’s work with feverish energy as one under the influence of a strong stimulant; he swallowed the iced tea and toast that constituted his scant supper and hurried to his post of observation—taking every precaution not to be seen.

The mysterious Sphinx began to exercise a strange influence upon his imagination. He pictured her to himself. His fancy filled out the suggestion of the shadow on the curtain with round, glowing limbs, with warm-tinted, palpitating flesh. He imagined the color of her eyes to be soft purple—the hue of the Mediterranean. The throat whence issued those exquisite notes, he knew must be soft and round. He could fancy it throbbing like a white bird’s



when she sung. Once, he dreamed of her, and he felt angry with himself because he had not the artist's power to put that dream-image into colors. He had it in his mind when he sat with General Montcalm on the back porch that shaded that gentleman's study.

They had smoked for some time in silence. Hazard's thoughts were with his Mystery of the Red House, but he had almost ceased to associate her with the Montcalm murder and the reward, and he almost started when the general said:

"Have you made any progress in that detective business, Hazard?"

"I—I can hardly say, sir. I have taken some steps that may or may not prove important."

"Have you got hold of anything like a clew to the whereabouts of that woman?"

"I may have a strong, sure clew, or it may possibly turn out none at all. I have not yet followed it up."

"What hinders you?"

"I am waiting further developments. There is a house I want searched, but I have hardly grounds yet to demand a warrant for such a proceeding."

"You think Laura Montcalm may be concealed in that house?"

"I do. I suspect that she has been in this city all the while—that she has been harbored by a man of wealth and high standing."

"Not Carleon, then?"

"No, altogether a different person—a man known and respected all over the whole State."

"You amaze me. This must be a chimera of your brain, my boy. Who is the man?"

"I would rather not tell you now. I will wait until I am sure of my game. But this is no fancy, believe me. It is grounded on singular and suspicious circumstances. General, let me ask you a few questions, and don't infer



anything from them, please. They may have a bearing on the matter in hand, or they may not. How long has old Miss Faust—the deformed occupant of the Red House, been living in Wallport?”

“About seven or eight years, I believe. Heathcliff bought the Red House property for her after old Glynn, who built it, drowned himself in his bath-tub. He had strangled his young wife in that same house, everybody believes, though the family doctor reported heart disease as the cause of her sudden death. Miss Faust flitted here in the night, like a bat (she is as ugly as any vampire), and took up her abode in the gloomy old mansion. She has never left it but once, that I know of—when she went to Europe for a short time. Once I saw her riding with Heathcliff, veiled and muffled up. She wears a veil in the house as well as out, so sensitive is she to her disfigurement—an enormous nose and a purple mark covering one side of her face. They say she is not only ugly as a fiend, but has the temper of one; is soured against the world, though she gives to charitable purposes sometimes generously enough—through Heathcliff. He is her lawyer and business agent. Nobody ever enters her house but he, not even a doctor. She believes in the cold-water-cure and practices it on herself.”

“You say she has been away once since she settled at the Red House—that she went to Europe on a short visit?”

“Yes; she has a brother living in Germany at their old family castle on the Rhine; Heathcliff told me. They had been estranged, and she was very angry with him, but he wrote while on his death-bed, begging her to come to him; and she went. She did not expect to return, and gave Heathcliff directions to rent or sell the Red House, but lo! and behold she was back again in two months’ time—returned, as she had gone—in the night.”

“When was it she returned?”



“Why, let me see—about two years ago.”

“Two years ago? The murder of your brother occurred about that time, did it not?”

“Yes; but what the mischief has Miss Faust to do with the murder?”

“Pardon me,” said Hazard, smiling and tossing his half-smoked cigar over the balustrade, “and let me go on with my questions. Was there no one beside his wife, who might be suspected of killing Captain Montcalm—no one who might have had a motive for the murder?”

“I don’t know, and it don’t matter; nobody but his wife did do the deed—that is clear as noonday. The gold-mounted stiletto she wore that day, as an ornament, was found in his heart. There was no one in the house but themselves at the time he was killed. She had disobeyed him that day—gone with a fast party over to Carleon’s seraglio on Aphrodite Island. He was deeply incensed, as he ought to have been. He denounced her and she stabbed him. Then she coolly packed up her jewels and other valuables and left the house, stepping into the stream of blood that had run across the hall from the body of her husband lying in the library, and leaving her foot-prints in blood as she passed out. As she opened the door she came face to face with her maid, and the girl’s escort, who were returning from a wedding. She started, then hurried by them. In her haste she caught her veil on the girl’s shoulder and both of the parties had a full view of her face in the bright moonlight. She has never, so far as known, been seen since.”

“Yes,” returned Hazard. “She was seen that same night entering Heathcliff’s yard.”

“Oh, that turned out all a mistake.”

“Did it? Well, perhaps so, but perhaps not. The fellow who testified to it, and afterward talked and acted in a way to bring discredit on his own testimony, is a peculiar



character. He is superstitious about testifying in a case of life and death, but—well, no matter—I have talked with him; he did not suspect me of being interested, and he told me a great deal more than was got out of him at the inquest; and—I believe all he told me. But to my questions. You are sure there was no one in the house at the time the murder occurred but the wife and husband?—where was the man who had brought Laura Montcalm from the island—her husband's confidential clerk—her own old friend and adopted brother, as well as guardian?"

"Whom do you mean—David Holt? Why, he had been taken desperately ill; was found in his room at my brother's warehouse next morning out of his head with brain fever. He never did recover his senses. It was a month before he was able to leave his bed; then his mind was gone. His friends took him away, and I believe, sent him to an asylum, where he died, as I heard."

"He didn't die. He got out of the asylum and wandered off. He was harmless, and as he had no money or rich kin, they made no great exertion to find him. I have made pretty extensive inquiries after him, but without success as yet."

"What do you want with him?"

"Why, who knows but he may have been a witness to the murder? Who knows how that sudden brain trouble was brought on? It came the same night of the tragedy. He was the last person seen with Laura Montcalm."

"A lady and her husband, living near my brother, testified to seeing Holt leave Mrs. Montcalm at the door, and go away in the direction of the warehouse."

"He may have returned. He may have witnessed the murder; he may now, even in his imbecile condition, retain some vague impression of it, and be led to say something that would throw light upon it."

"What do you want with more light? Every fool knows who did the murder. All we want is to find that female



fiend—Laura Montcalm. That is the business I confided to you. Stick to the matter in hand, my boy. Never mind collateral circumstances. If we can find that woman she is sure to hang. We need no more evidence than we have already. There is enough to put a rope around her neck.”

Hazard shuddered; the general saw it.

“You think me vindictive, Hazard,” he said. “I *am* in this matter. I loved my brother as son and friend as well as brother. I was much older than he, and had had charge of him in his boyhood. He was a splendid fellow when he first grew up—handsome as a prince, generous, brave, gifted. He got into a scrape in Mexico with a woman, that came near making a cynic of him and an exile from his country; but he was coming out from that shadow. I looked to him to sustain the family name; to retrieve the mistakes of his youth and go down to the grave with honors, leaving an heir to our name. There is none now. I have no son. Do you wonder that I hate the murderer of my brother? I can never rest content until she has received the punishment she deserves—woman though she be.”

“And most fair, they tell me.”

“Ay, beautiful as Clytemnestra and as fiendish. I can’t talk of her coolly. Follow up that clew if you have one; unearth her and bring her to punishment, and I am your debtor for life.”

Stern as Cato’s looked the old general’s Roman features as he sat, his head thrown back on the violet lining of the chair, his deep-set eyes gazing out into the gathering gloom.

Hazard thought of the old warrior’s lurid look and his fierce speech to-night, as he sat in the empty, cobwebbed upper room of the old rookery he had rented that he might keep watch on the Red House through the turned blinds of the window behind which he sat. The window opposite



was unlighted. The moon was shining high in the heavens, and its rays silvered the leaves of the olive and magnolia-trees. One of these beams touched the windows of the Sphinx's boudoir.

“If she should come to the window as she did once when the room was dark, and stand where the light falls, I could see her,” Hazard thought, and he waited, opera-glass in hand.

She did come. She came and stood by the window; the outlines of her lovely shape were visible. Presently she seated herself in the low embrasure of the window, and leaned her head against the side-frame. She was dressed in a filmy white stuff; the moonlight glimmered here and there over her figure—over her waist, her arms, her shoulders, her full white throat even. Only her face and her head were in shadow.

Sitting there she began to sing. Her song was in a minor key; plainly she was afraid lest a tone of it should reach the street. But across the narrow space of moonlit darkness and stillness, Hazard could hear every note and word of the gypsy love-song:

Zara, the moon has left the sky,  
We want the shining of thine eye.

Come, oh! come;  
Let those eyes of thine  
Pour light into mine,  
As the bright stars gleam on some dark stream.  
Come, oh! come.

Zara, there's sorrow in the sea;  
We want thy voice's melody—

Come, oh! come.  
Let its music free  
Float out to me  
As the wild wind sings to the lone harp-strings.  
Come—



The song ceased abruptly.

“Ah, you are here at last; you are late,” said the voice that had sung, as the figure started up from the window. The next instant the curtain was dropped; but Hazard saw a tall man’s shape outlined upon the curtain.

“It is Heathcliff!” cried the boy. “I would know that square-shouldered, military shadow anywhere. Curse him! what does he want with two beautiful women? And beautiful that Mystery is. I could swear it by that shape, that voice, that lovely throat. That neck to have a rope knotted about it? Horrible! But it *must* if my suspicions are true; and I am almost ready to stake my life upon it that they are. Ira Heathcliff, the Damocles sword hangs over you. A search warrant shall bring your dark secret to light. Then away goes your Sunday-school reputation, away goes your political prospects, away goes your marriage with Honor Montcalm. You will never lord it in the executive mansion; more likely you will preside over a cell in yonder jail. Your hour will be over, mine will begin to strike. Let Montcalm take his seat as governor, and I am sure of advancement—sure of the hand of that proud beauty who scorns me now.”

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE hot August day was on the wane. The low sun looked through bars of crimson, shading into purple. A sea-breeze was abroad, cooling heated brows and stirring the plumes of the palm and pine.

Cool as a fresh-opened flower looked Kildee in her lilac muslin, standing under the blue and white awning in front of the shop. Before her were fruits and flowers and baskets of grapes arranged with vine-leaves; behind her (in the shop window) a background of broad-leaved aquatic plants and rich-flowered gladioli.



St. Peter, now well combed and cared for, sat on a low stool, smiling in his half-happy, half-melancholy fashion as he watched the nimble fingers and sharp teeth of Zach explore the winding labyrinth of a walnut. Madame Jean's fruit and flower-shop had thriven since Kildee became the presiding genius. She and her protégés proved drawing cards indeed. They harmonized with the Italian look of the little shop. The figs and citrons, the little golden melons and red lilies, the graceful, dark-eyed child-woman, and the gray-haired musician with his refined brow and large, limpid, vacant eyes, his violin and his miniature monkey, and his confiding dependence on Kildee—these made up a picture which struck even the least imaginative.

Carleon saw that picture this afternoon for the first time. He had been out on the race-track, riding Mahmoud furiously. The horse's black hide was white-flecked with foam as the rider threw himself from the saddle in front of a public stable, and flung the bridle to a groom, with the orders to let the animal cool gradually. Two of his old associates dashed up in a light buggy almost at the same instant; several other young "bloods" of the city were lounging in front of the handsome stable, drawn there by the fascination there is, for most men, in horses. They looked hard at Carleon when he rode up, and bowed to him in an eager way but did not venture to approach him. His manner was not encouraging. His moods of late had kept his satellites at a distance. They had never presumed to be familiar; something about him forbade this. They were accustomed to occasional brusque and haughty treatment, to absent-minded indifference, to receiving favors seasoned with sarcasms, and to having their attempts at intimacy cut short by a cool disdain; but these were fitting moods. His present gloomy reserve seemed something that would not pass. His haughtiness became cold repulsion; his slightly stinging sarcasm became savage irony. Just now, when he was the theme of conversation, the object of pub-



lic curiosity, he baffled all the attempts of his former associates to find out the meaning of his sudden curve. For he had astounded the public by donating to the city the whole of Aphrodite Island with its beautiful grounds and grand mansion as a Home for Orphan Girls. What was his motive? Reporters interviewed him without result, ministers approached him, hoping for a convert, and came away stung by his polished, half-sneering courtesy. The city fathers tendered thanks, and he cut short their speeches with uncivil brusqueness.

One night, when he had lounged into his old club-room, through very restlessness, one of his disciples—a dashing young fellow who had claimed to be Carleon's pet, piqued at his present indifference, began to "chaff" him in a way none of the others had ventured upon.

"Don't you see, boys; it's one of two things. Either Carleon is in love with some demure little Methodist, and anxious to ingratiate himself with her papa, the preacher, or he is about to embark in politics and that donation is his grand *coup*."

Carleon was looking at a picture lately hung. He had his back to the speaker and his group of listeners. He wheeled and looked at him.

"Do I remind you of a diplomat currying popular favor, or a lover seeking to please?"

The fierce scorn in his eye and voice, the haughty, half-savage curl of his mustached lip made the young man change color and fall back a little as the other faced him.

"Of course I was only joking," he said, trying to laugh. "Nobody can accuse you of wanting to please, particularly these latter days. But we can't help puzzling over your late conundrum. What the Beelzebub was your object in doing that thing—the Aphrodite business, you know?"

"The same that made Alcibiades of Athens cut off the tail of his dog—to give the fools of the city something to talk about," said Carleon, and he left the club-room.



“ Ah, Carleon,” said Vaughn, as the former was walking away from the stable, “ you are the man I was looking for. I want to see you about leasing the Moran building. I heard you had refused to let Black renew his lease; is it so?”

“ It is.”

“ And was it, as he says, because he wanted it for a wholesale liquor store?”

“ It doesn’t matter what it was because of. Do you want to lease the building?”

“ Why, yes, but I should only want the first and second floor; but Parks—you know him—well, but let’s talk as we walk along.”

He hooked his arm in Carleon’s and they walked on together. They soon came to an end of the lease business, and talked of indifferent matters as they sauntered on in the stream of other pedestrians.

“ Here, turn this corner,” Vaughn said. “ I want to show you a bit of ‘ Wilhelm Meister ’—so it seems. Look there, in front of Madame Jean’s fruit-shop. See that majestic, melancholy old musician, with the flowing silver beard; see the girl by him with the great dark eyes, and sweet, wistful mouth, the clear, pale brow, and curling hair. Mignon and her unknown father—eh? If only the old chap had a harp instead of that fiddle.”

Carleon slouched his hat over his eyes to hide his agitation. It was the first time he had seen Kildee since she left Aphrodite Island.

“ Does she sell fruit for Madame Jean?” he managed to ask.

“ Yes, fruit and flowers. Lovely, isn’t she?—out of the way kind of beauty; I knew you’d appreciate it. You ought to thank me for showing her to you. However, it’s not so disinterested in me after all, for I’ve squandered all my odd dimes and wasted my smiles and prettiest flatteries in that quarter without producing the least effect.



There's no commonplace coyness about the girl; she's free as a child in her ways, but there's something about her I can't penetrate. But you—"

"Nobody but a villain would try to penetrate that atmosphere of purity to do her an evil," Carleon interrupted.

Vaughn stared in blank amazement.

"Thank you," he said presently, forcing a laugh. "I suppose you mean to be personal. Well, we will leave the pretty fruit girl alone. Shall we step into Schumiel's and get a beer?"

"No, I am going to buy some grapes of the girl, she has probably seen us looking at her."

They went up to the fruit-stand under the cool, white and blue awning. Carleon cursed himself for a coward when he felt how fiercely his heart throbbed as he stood before the little figure in lilac muslin and felt the glance of her dark soft eyes upon his face. But she was quite calm, though she had changed color when she saw him. She put up the grapes and counted out the change for the bill he gave her.

"These are large juicy pears—give me two of them," he said; and while she was putting them up he dropped a ten-dollar gold piece into Zach's little paw. "Ten cents!" he said. "I have given the money to your little pet here. You can bring the pears, Vaughn."

He walked on, leaving his friend to follow. Kildee's quick eye had detected the ruse, and she had as quickly checkmated it.

"Hillo!" said Vaughn, presently, as he cut one of the California pears. "Does our pretty Pomona sell the golden fruit of Hesperides? See here."

He held up the ten-dollar gold piece. Kildee had pressed it through the crisp rind of one of the pears. "Witchcraft—isn't it, eh?"

"Looks like it," answered Carleon, moodily, vexed with



himself at the clumsy attempt to help her, and fearful she would mistake his motive.

He could not resist the craving to see her, and next day found him near Mme. Jean's. He intended to go by without pausing, save for one look, but as he was passing, a voice called his name, and turning, he saw Kildee looking at him with outstretched hand.

"Let me thank you," she said.

"For what? You have no cause to thank me."

"Oh! I have. All orphan-girls owe you heartfelt thanks and blessings."

She had that day heard of his gift of Aphrodite Island as a Home for Orphan Girls.

"Thank yourself," he said. "But for you it would not have been. You would not accept anything from me for yourself; you would not even let your marmoset take that little present yesterday."

She smiled deprecatingly; then she looked up archly.

"You owe me a quarter yet," she said.

His own features relaxed into a smile. He paid the money, and she said:

"And now, will you take a little gift from me? This was Monsieur Jean's reward of merit for making good coffee this morning."

She lifted a beautiful *Gloire* rose from a glass filled with water.

"I give it to you," she said, laying it in Carleon's hand.

He took it, his agitated eyes fixed themselves on her.

"When I die the rose will be buried with me," he said.

His voice was husky with intense feeling. She dropped her eyes and her color faded; the smile left her lips.

"Fool that I am," he thought as he walked away. "I startle her with my insane passion. I will not let her look on me with tolerance. I must trample this mad feeling



out of my heart. I could do it if there were some strong, exciting movement to throw myself into. But where shall I find that? I have tried everything.”

That same evening Heathcliff said to M. Jean:

“I am troubled about my factory people. So many of them are down with the dengue fever that is ravaging the city. Whole families have been stricken with it at the Factory Tenement Row, and there is so much suffering it makes my heart ache. There is great scarcity of nurses. Many are dying for want of careful watching. I have just left a sad case—a woman who was an industrious, skillful weaver; but she is a crabbed, fierce creature, and by no means a favorite in the factory. She is ill, and I can get no one to nurse her for love or money. She will die if she does not get proper attention.”

“Let *me* nurse her, Mr. Heathcliff,” said Kildee, who had listened intently.

“You? you are not strong enough. Besides, you would catch the fever. No, no, little bird.”

“I am quite strong, and I have nursed the sick often and often. And I will not take the fever, for I have had it once in Mexico, and learned there how to nurse it. Madame Jean can spare me part of the day, and at night. I am a capital hand to sit up.”

She did not rest until she had carried her point. That night, she was installed in a room in Factory Row as nurse to “cross Nell Barnes.”

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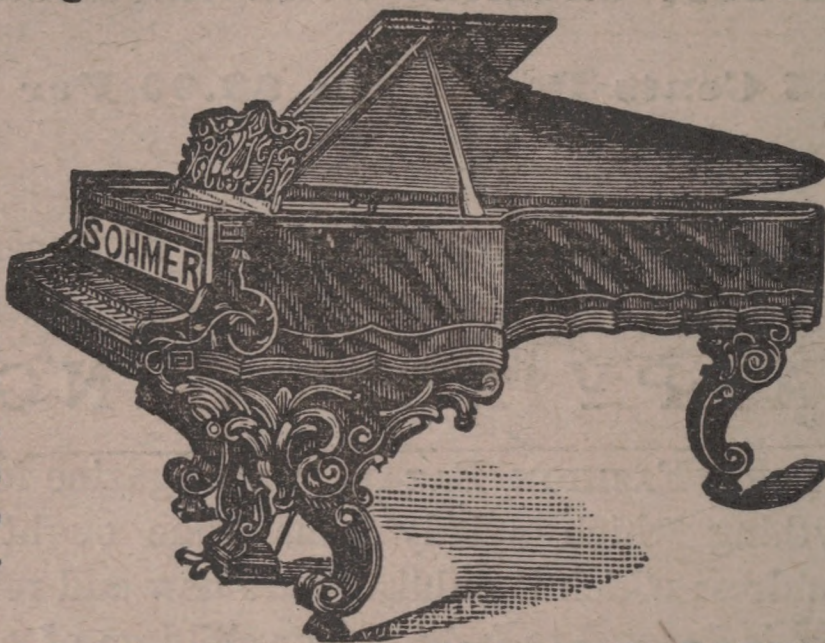
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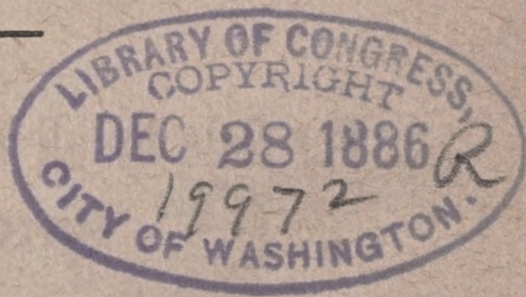
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AUTHOR OF "THE BAYOU BRIDE," ETC.

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# KILDEE;

OR,

## The Sphinx of the Red House.

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### CHAPTER XXIX.

A CLOSE, cloudy night. Flashes of lightning in the east portend rain, perhaps storm. Kildee's patient had just dropped to sleep—refreshed by the cool water in which the little nurse had just bathed her hands and face. The gray head and sallow face rest on the cotton pillow, and the sickly night-lamp shows that even in sleep the woman's features are restless. The brows contract, the lips twitch; sometimes a muttered word escapes them. There is a look of hardness on the mouth, but other lines, expressive of suffering, soften the bitter expression with their pathetic suggestion of poverty and struggle.

The woman is known in the factory quarter as "cross old Nell Barnes." She is cordially disliked by her fellow-workers and the rumors of her ill-temper have deterred any one from consenting to nurse her, even for pay. During the days Kildee has been nursing her the men and women occupants of the Factory Tenement House would occasionally stop at the door and inquire how the "old woman" was doing, and if she "got into her tantrums last night," or looking commiseratingly at Kildee, say, "ruther 'twas you than me that had to 'tend her," or "how do you manage to get on with that old cat?"

At first old Nell had fully illustrated her reputation for crossness, but as she lay during an easy interval, she began to look at the girl standing at the foot of the bed cooling the soup for the sick woman. "Put the soup down to cool itself and you come here," she said.

Kildee obeyed her, and she began to question her about



her parentage, her early life, her history generally. As Kildée replied, the fever-red on the woman's cheek began to deepen, and her eyes to burn with excitement. Her lips trembled; she made Kildée come close to her; she peered at her until the girl felt a thrill of terror at the proximity of those deep-set burning eyes. Then she pushed her from her and lay muttering to herself.

"Yes, I can make it right—if I will; but—I won't. Not now. Time enough. But, poor little thing, she wasn't to blame," Kildée heard her say in broken sentences, and thought she was again out of her head. But after this incident "Old Nell" was almost gentle to her nurse and seemed really to try to curb her ill temper.

She had been very restless all day, and Kildée fancied her worse. The girl sat very still, glad to have her patient sleep, and looked down into the black, gulf-like darkness, through which shone mistily the gas-stars of the city. She heard steps in the hall, a soft knock upon the door. She knew both step and knock, and the light of pleasure came into her eyes as she rose quickly and softly opened the door.

Heathcliff's tall figure stood outside in the semi-darkness.

"Will you not come in, sir?" she asked.

"No, my child. I only called by to bring some more wine for Mrs. Barnes and to tell you not to sit up late. Mrs. Betts, whose room is just across the hall, promises to relieve your watch to-night. You must go into her room and sleep."

He put a basket in her hand. She could see fruit and bottles of wine under the cover. On the top lay a new magazine and a bunch of sweet violets.

"For you," he said, seeing her eyes rest upon these.

"For me? Oh, I thank you. How did you know I was wishing so for some violets? I fancied, when I opened the door, that you had brought the odors of Araby with



you. But I caught a gleam of red; I thought it was roses.”

“Little Keen Eyes! Yes, the roses are here—a perfect pyramid of them, but you are only to have a peep. It is to reward some of the singers at the concert to-night. They sing for the relief of the sick poor of our town, and it is my duty and pleasure to show that I appreciate the good deed. But you must have one rose.”

“No, no, it would spoil the arrangement of the flowers. How lovely they are! I have feasted my eyes and nose there! I am going away from temptation. I hear Mrs. Barnes stirring. Good-night, sir, and thank you again.”

“Good-night, child!” he said, softly. He stood a moment after she had left him, looking at the little head with its dark delicate tendrils of hair, bending over the sallow, bony face on the pillow.

“God bless her!” he said, as he turned away.

“I wasn’t asleep just now,” the woman said to Kildee. “I knew Heathcliff’s voice and I heard what he said about the charity concert and the flowers. I know who he is going to give them to. She’s kin of mine—that proud, high-steppin’ beauty, though they’d never own it without blushin’, and small good the kinship’s ever done me. Yes, the fine roses were for Honor Montcalm. They say he’s going to marry her; she’s not good enough for him, but she’s got the Montcalm beauty that the men go crazy over, and she’s got the Montcalm pride—her full share. Good mercy, how my throat burns! Give me some cool water. You call *that* cool water? I’m a good mind to throw it in your face. Ah! that crushed ice is good. Don’t mind me, child. I’m a cross old hag, as they call me. I hope you’re not going to leave me to-night. I’m afraid I shall have one of my turns about midnight.”

When she was quiet again, Kildee went back to her seat by the window and watched the play of the lightning among the cloud-craggs revealed by its flashes—watched it mechan-



ically after awhile, for her ear presently caught a strain of distant music, borne from the opera-house where the concert was going on. Kildee's eyes filled with tears, her thoughts went back to the happy nights with her friends—the Ducciole Troupe, Max, Lottie—the fascination of the play, and what thrilling pleasure it was to do her part well and have the audience clap, and Max catch her hands when the curtain dropped, and the papa professor embrace her in his fat arms and tell her she was a credit to her teacher.

“Where are they now? If I only knew I would write. I am sure now they never meant to desert me. They did not know where I was, their letters were never permitted to reach me, and mine were never sent.”

A louder strain of music turned her thoughts to the concert again, and she pictured to herself the brilliant scene. The light, the flowers, the crowded hall, the tall fair singer—Miss Montcalm lifting with her white arms the great bouquet of roses, and bending her proud head in acknowledgement of her lover's gift. Her lover. How strange to fancy Mayor Heathcliff a lover. So calm, so gravely kind, she had never imagined him paying lover-like attentions, whispering tender flatteries. How could he give so much time to sick and poor people and forlorn girls like her, when there were beautiful women always ready to welcome him and fill his leisure hours with music and accomplished talk?

Even Kildee's fancy did not shape Honor Montcalm as fair as she stood that night singing a duet from a popular opera, with a slim young tenor who flushed and thrilled at the fervor of her tones as though the warmth were meant for him, when in truth she forgot his presence in the passion of her theme, and sung for one man in the crowded audience, whose grand head rose above all others, and whose gray eyes, ordinarily so cool, were luminous with tenderness when they rested upon her.



It was an inspired hour for Honor. Her theme was heroic. It suited her—suited her noble face, her majestic shape. She sung with all her soul. Gone were the suspicions which had haunted her since Hazard whispered his warning. In their place were perfect trust and proud devotion for the man she had chosen as her king. What a look she flashed upon him as she bent her head and received in her bare, beautiful arms the pyramid of fragrant bloom of which Kildee had had a glimpse! He reserved, though, one cluster of perfect roses and a beautiful Nile lily. He held these still in his hand. They too were for her, she felt sure. He knew the mystic scroll lily was her favorite flower. He would put it and the roses in her hand when he placed her in the carriage and murmur his few words of praise, “you did well, my dear Honor.” Such brief praise, but it was more to her than all the flowery compliments of others, first because it was true. He was truth itself.

This was her last part in the concert. There was yet a comic scene from the “Barber of Seville” to wind up with. She went to the dressing-room to put her flowers into water, stood awhile in a reverie by the window, and then went into one of the passages between the scenes and listened to the singing on the stage. Some one behind her called her name in low, eager tones. She turned around and saw Hazard Hall, his dark face full of excitement.

“You said you would believe if you saw with your own eyes. You shall see to-night—*now* if you will go with me.”

“Do you mean about Mr. Heathcliff? He is there among the audience.”

“He is not there. He went away the moment you left the stage. He has gone to the Red House. She is waiting for him. Come and you shall be convinced.”

She looked at him without speaking. Swift changes swept over her face, pale with haughty, incredulous resentment, spasmed with jealous fear, eager with a desire to



know all. This last motive conquered pride and she said with slow, guarded utterance:

“I will go; wait for me here.”

She turned back into the dressing-room and found a dark, long wrap which she threw over her lovely dress and bare arms, and drew the hood of it over her head. Then she went back to Hazard.

The others behind the scenes who were not now singing, had gone up nearer the stage to see and hear the clever rendering of the bit from “*Il Barbieri*.” So those two passed out unnoticed through the greenroom door, and down the private stairway. A cab waited for them near the sidewalk. Hazard put Miss Montcalm in it and entered after her; and the carriage moved swiftly away. The driver had received his orders beforehand.

Only once did Hazard speak during the drive: then it was to reassure Honor. He could hear the excited beating of her heart, as she sat beside him. She said nothing in return, but when the carriage stopped at a signal from Hazard, and he assisted her to alight before a house which loomed up, a shadowy, rayless mass, she turned to him and demanded to know where he was taking her.

“We are going into this house,” he answered. “It is a vacant building which I was obliged to rent for the furtherance of the detective operations your father intrusted me with. A window in one of the upper back rooms gives a view of what is happening in an apartment of the Red House, which stands next to it with fence and trees between.”

“And you wish me to look into the window of that room? I will not. It is dishonorable.”

“Then you never can have proof of Heathcliff’s treachery. I see that you are afraid of the truth. You wish to hug the falsehood to your heart—to go to the altar blinded and deceived. Very well.”

With a low laugh of contempt, he turned from her, but



he wheeled back again and laid a firm grasp on her arm:

“You *shall* go in,” he said. “I have sent away the carriage not to return for half an hour. I am going in the house and you must go with me. You have promised, and I will not be trifled with.”

He spoke in under-tones, but with that stern determination which carries a woman’s will with it. She let him draw her hand under his arm and lead her through the gate, which he noiselessly unlocked, up the shaky steps and into the unlighted hall.

It was as dark as an underground vault, but Honor no longer hesitated or questioned. Her conductor struck a match and lighted a lantern which he took from the wall. By its dim illumination, they made their way upstairs and to the entrance of the last room on one side of the hall. Here Hazard shut the door of the lantern and set it on the hall floor, saying:

“We must have no light. It would put them on their guard. Let me have your hand.”

He felt her tremble and draw back, but only for an instant. She allowed him to lead her into the dark, still room and guide her to a window. He softly unlatched the shutters and pushed them open. She looked out across the black space which intervened between the houses—a gulf-like vista with dusky tree-boughs below it and on either side. The house was a mass of shadow, save that one lighted parallelogram of the open window. The interior thus revealed made a colorful picture upon the blackness which framed it. A background of tinted wall on which hung a long mirror. In front of this was a small stand, holding a vase of ferns, and beside it a light chair of red and pale-yellow wicker-work.

Such was the picture comprised within the lighted square. A still picture; nothing moved, not even a frond of the graceful ferns. The two at the window watched and wait-



ed, silent, almost breathless in the darkness, their eyes fixed on the illumined space, as though it were a magic mirror that should presently reveal their destinies. Hazard's suspense was almost as torturing as that of the woman at his side. He had risked his hopes of success on this scheme of bringing her here to witness her lover's unfaithfulness. If nothing came of it, he would have incurred her contemptuous anger and disbelief evermore, and he would have lost perhaps his last opportunity of identifying the mysterious young woman of the Red House with the fugitive Laura Montcalm.

Half an hour ago as he watched here in his old detective place, he had seen this Sphinx of the Red House come to the window of her boudoir and throw open the blinds as though tired of her sultry prison. The room was dimly lighted, apparently by a lamp in the adjoining (inner) room. He could see her figure—dressed in some light rich fabric, but could not distinguish her features at all plainly. Their shadowy outline, however, confirmed him in the impression that she was beautiful. From her dress and restless movements, he conjectured she was expecting some one. He hurried to the opera-house, where he knew he should find Heathcliff. As he reached the theater entrance he saw Heathcliff come out with some flowers in his hand, enter his carriage and drive off in the direction of the Red House.

“He has gone to visit his pet bird in her cage,” was the young man's swift conclusion.

He made his way behind the scenes—his connection with the press giving him the *entrée*—and proceeded to find Honor and announce that she could now satisfy herself of her lover's infidelity.

But he had done this at a venture. If she should see no one, he would lose all. And for a time no one was to be seen.

Suddenly the lifeless aspect of the picture across the



way was broken. A woman's form moved into the dimly lighted space and stopped beside the vase of ferns. Her face was turned from the window, but there was a lithe, symmetric shape robed in blue, a gleam of burnished hair low on a graceful neck, a hand with shapely arm, bare to the elbow, holding out (Honor knew them at once) the Nile lily and creamy roses that Heathcliff had taken from the bouquet he sent her after her singing.

The white hand parted the fern leaves in the vase and placed the tall Nile lily among them; then the roses all but one. She kept this in her hand, holding up the foam-tinted cup that bent the leafy stem; then turning to the mirror, her face still invisible save for one cheek, she put the rose in her hair, and slightly turning, bowed as though in acknowledgment of praise from some invisible person. All at once her head drooped. She took the flower from her hair; she sunk into the chair and buried her face in her arms, crossed on the flower-stand before her.

Miss Montcalm was surely somewhat prepared for what followed; yet a shock that was felt by Hazard, sitting so near her, went through her frame as a tall form—Ira Heathcliff's—stepped into the lighted space. He came and stood beside the blue-robed figure. He bent down and stroked the bowed golden head. The light on his face showed his grave features softened by tenderness.

Presently the lady stood up, lifting her face to meet his look; she put one of her arms around his neck and dropped her head on his breast. He stood a moment with his arms around her, and his head bent to hers, then he gently put her a little from him, and holding her hand—moved away—out of the lighted space.

Honor had not spoken or stirred while this drama went on before her eyes. She did not move now. She sat with her eyes still fixed on the spot which the two forms had occupied.

Soon there came a dash of the long-threatened rain, and



a man's arm and hand were seen closing the blinds of the window over the way. The building was now one unrelieved, dimly defined mass. The rain was spattering into the faces of Hazard and Miss Montcalm; still she did not move. He touched her hand to draw her away; the hand was colder than the rain. He became suddenly anxious. Had she fainted? He could not see in the darkness. He leaned over her and grasped her shoulder.

“Miss Montcalm! Honor—”

She shook off his hand and rose to her feet at once.

“Let us go,” she said.

Her low constrained tones did not deceive him. He knew she was trembling in every limb, and when they came out into the hall, and he opened the lantern, letting the light flash over her face, she was so pale that he said quickly:

“Forgive me for making you suffer so. I thought it was best you should know.”

She drew away the hand that he had seized.

“It is best,” she said coldly. “Say no more; take me home if you please.”

“One word,” he said, “I had a double purpose in bringing you here. That woman—she was your uncle's wife. She was Laura Montcalm, was she not?”

“Laura Montcalm!”

She dropped the cloak she was drawing around her, and it fell to the floor. She stood there in her white robes—scarce whiter than her face. This added blow was almost more than she could bear.

“It was really she, then,” Hazard said. “I was almost sure of it before. He is harboring her here—that murderess!”

“Silence! I do not believe it!” she cried, with angry lighting of her eyes. “How do you know that woman was Laura Montcalm?”

“I did not know. I asked you. It is true, we had no



good look at her face. You did not see her features, but you saw her shape, her carriage, her head, her hair; surely you can tell me if she was your uncle's wife."

"I can not tell," she said faintly. "I have not seen her since I was quite young. I was away at the convent. I came home the same week of the murder, but I had not seen her, only my uncle."

"Is it possible?"

A frown of annoyance darkened Hazard's brow. He was deeply disappointed. He had never thought but that Honor would at once recognize Laura Montcalm if this mysterious woman was she.

"She will identify her, and to-morrow I will procure a warrant to search the Red House," he had said to himself as he watched the fair-haired Sphinx opposite his post of observation. He had failed in one of his objects to-night; and now he might never have an opportunity of identifying this secret inmate of the Red House with the woman he was hunting down.

"But surely you remember something of Mrs. Montcalm's appearance," he persisted. "She was a beautiful woman—a—a blonde—like the one we have just seen—was she not?"

Honor shivered as she gathered up her cloak.

"I have told you I have not seen her in years," she answered, in cold, husky tones.

She could not fasten the clasp of the cloak, her fingers trembled so. He came to her aid, not heeding her hand which motioned him away. He fastened the clasp under her throbbing throat and drew the folds of the wrap closely around her. They came out on the veranda—and saw the carriage—a dim mass—just before the gate. A wild dash of rain made Hazard detain Miss Montcalm, and draw her back against the wall, out of the reach of the spattering drops.

"It is but a gust; it will soon be over," he said. She



did not speak for a minute. He wished for a flash of lightning that he might see her face, but none came. Presently she said, speaking in low, controlled tones:

“What will you do about this—this affair?”

“I shall get a warrant to search the Red House and drag Ira Heathcliff’s guilty secret to light. It will ruin him, but what matter, he deserves it—the hypocrite! Let justice be done.”

He could feel her flinch and shiver as she stood beside him.

“You will not warn him,” he said. “You are your father’s child; and though you love him—”

“Though I *have* loved him,” she answered. “We cease to love when we cease to honor.”

Hazard’s heart beat triumphantly.

“Let us go,” she said. “The violence of the rain is over.”

It was raining still, and the walk was wet. Hazard remembered her little, satin-slippered feet. He asked no permission; he caught her up in his arms, and ran with her to the cab, despite her struggles to free herself.

“Dearest,” he whispered, “forgive me. I could not let you walk. I have been cruel enough to you to-night.”

She did not answer, nor did she speak as the carriage rolled away through the rain and gloom.

Two figures rose up on the piazza of the old house they had just quitted—a girl and a man. A flash of lightning showed the girl’s face pale and troubled.

“I am glad we ran in here out of the storm,” she said. “It was Providence.”

Her companion looked in her face and smiled confidently—vacantly. Then holding the great blue umbrella over her, he stepped down the rickety stairs by her side and they went out into the rainy street.



## CHAPTER XXX.

THE city clock was striking ten when a knock again brought Kildee to the door. A faint, timid knock at first, then a louder rap and a voice that she recognized. She was not surprised when she opened the door to behold St. Peter. He had escaped from Mme. Jean's charge and found his way to the Factory Row. He had more than once followed Kildee to the tenement house. His appearance here to-night worried her. There was no place for him to sleep. He would be restless, and want to play on his violin, and it was necessary to have quiet in the sick-room.

She was afraid to send him away. The chances were that he would not return to Mme. Jean's, but would hang about the tenement house all night, sleep on the stairs, probably, or be taken to the lock-up by a policeman.

While she was thinking what she should do Mrs. Betts came in, and said she had got her "young ones" to bed and was ready to carry out the promise she had made Mr. Heathcliff of relieving Kildee's watch. She felt quite fresh because of an afternoon nap, and wouldn't mind sitting up with the old lady the rest of the night. There would be no need that any one should sit up altogether, she thought. The patient seemed resting pretty well and "a body who was a light sleeper could lie on the other side of the bed and snatch little naps between the times when there was a necessity for being up."

"Then I will go home and take St. Peter with me," Kildee said.

"And start right off," advised the woman, "for it will rain again soon, I'm pretty sure. That last shower wasn't the finishin' one. The hevings look too black."

Kildee started at once. She took St. Peter's hand and



hurried him along. But the rain began to fall before they were half-way to Mme. Jean's. They took refuge in the stately columned porch of a church. Services were going on, and the singing and the sermon could be heard through the long, large windows opening to the floor of the portico. Kildee leaned against the wall near one of these windows and St. Peter seated himself at her feet.

Two half-tipsy young men had followed them down the street. These now stopped in front of the church under their umbrellas and seemed undecided about their further movements. At length one of them laughed, shook his head and went on; the other mounted the steps of the church, shut his umbrella and approached Kildee.

"You're weather-bound, it seems, miss, won't you walk on with me under my umbrella?"

"Thank you, no," she answered with her air of gentle reserve.

The tone and manner would have deterred any but a half-drunken fop from making further advances. He edged near to her and said insinuatingly:

"Well, you won't object to my standing here and looking at you."

Kildee turned from him and rested her hand on St. Peter's shoulder. But the fellow knew the white-haired musician to be an imbecile.

"What's the sense in being so deuced coquettish?" he said, trying to peep under her hat. "You are as pretty as a peach blossom; you ought not to be so—"

A hand laid heavily on his shoulder made him start and turn about. Some one else had seen Kildee and the old fiddler take shelter in the church porch. It was Carleon who faced her tipsy persecutor. The fellow was disconcerted. All the town knew Carleon's strength of arm and fire of temper.

"Get away from here at once," he said in suppressed tones.



The man had sense enough to see that Carleon wanted no altercation at a church door and took advantage of it.

“I have as much right here as you,” he said, “and here I’ll stay.”

Carleon said not a word. He seized the fellow by the collar and waistband, lifted him to the steps and threw him down them into the street. He landed with a loud splash into a puddle, rose muttering threats, and limped away.

The proceeding gave much delight to St. Peter. Before Kildee knew what he was about, he had unslung his fiddle and scraped the first notes of a lively fantasia—his manner of expressing gratification. With some difficulty she persuaded him to desist. When she raised her head that had been bent over the refractory saint, she saw Carleon standing on the other side the window, leaning against the wall, not looking at her—seeming to listen to the sermon that was being preached inside.

The preacher’s resonant voice made itself heard above the dash of the rain. He was a revival preacher of some celebrity—Methodist, yet not conforming to “Conference” rules in that he was not “stationed” at any one place, but traveled from town to town, “firing the heart of the church,” as he said. Non-religious people called him a fanatic, a crank; pious men and women hailed him as an inspired upholder of a standard that had its periods of drooping. Sam Brown was combative in his nature. He had the instincts of the soldier and the zeal of a “Round-head.” With hardly an “old field school education,” he possessed the elements of a popular speaker—enthusiasm, self-belief, imagination, humor. His original way of expressing himself drew attention. His quaint, forcible, often laughable illustrations impressed themselves on his hearers. His enthusiasm was contagious. His energy, his fearlessness, his belief in himself as an ordained captain in the fight against the devil were almost sublime. He was



always ready to tackle the arch-fiend. In the street, in the shop, in the private parlor as in the church, he went with his sleeves rolled up and his fists clinched, so to speak.

He was at his best to-night. He poured out a wealth of epigram and illustration—some of these more forcible than elegant, and some so quaint and comic that his listeners laughed out. The next moment, a touch of homely pathos drew their tears. The very plainness of his language—its scorn of the rules of grammar and rhetoric added a charm to his talk. It was as though he disdained any setting for the diamond message he was charged with.

The rain poured. The preacher's voice rose, and rang with a peculiar clash that set nerves to tingling with its suggestion of sword-like force. Presently, while the congregation sung he came down from the platform and walked among the crowd; speaking to them, right and left, calling some of them by name and exhorting them personally. As he made his way between the rear benches to speak to a sobbing woman, his quick eye caught sight of Carleon leaning near the window on the outside. A moment after he came to the window.

"Come in, my friend," he said. "There's plenty of room in the Lord's ark without hanging on to the outside guards."

He suddenly recognized Carleon; his eyes kindled, he laid his strong grasp on Carleon's shoulder.

"Ah! my brother," he said, "I knew the hand of the Lord was upon you. His spirit is at war with Apollyon in your breast. Yield to Him. Come over and join our army of recruits for the great fight."

Carleon shook the preacher's hand from his shoulder.

"Leave me alone," he said, "I want none of your cant. Go back and humbug your set in yonder. I stopped here for shelter, not to listen to your ravings."

"You stopped because the angel of the Lord stayed your steps as it did Saul of Tarsus. I'll leave you now,



but I shall talk to you again soon. I will come to see you."

"You can spare yourself the trouble," Carleon answered. "I will not see you."

"You assuredly will," said Sam Brown, turning off and joining in the ringing chorus of the hymn the congregation was singing.

The rain ceased to pour, though the sky was still black and the lightning leaped out at intervals.

"Come," said Kildee to St. Peter.

"Stay; let me get you a cab," Carleon interposed.

But Kildee stopped him. She said decisively that she preferred to walk.

"May I not bear you company? It is hardly safe for you to be in the streets at this hour with only this irresponsible creature," he said, wondering at himself for the timidity with which he—Carleon—made the request of this little fruit-seller.

"I am not afraid," she answered. "I have not far to go." And she added, fearing he might think strange she should be out at this time of night, "I have been nursing some of the sick at Factory Row."

"I know it," he said. And then with a slight sneer in his tones: "It seems to me your exemplary guardian, Heathcliff, is not overcareful of you to let you do such a thing and to allow you to expose yourself on such a night—"

"It was by my own wish that I went to nurse some of the fever patients," Kildee said coldly. "And my being out to-night is an accident. Good-night, sir."

He put his large silk umbrella into St. Peter's hands as the two descended the church-steps. It was still drizzling rain, and he foresaw that another shower would overtake the girl and her charge.

Another shower did come, and it found Kildee and her companion on the street, further from their destination



than before. Somehow in the mist and gloom and the confusion of thought following upon that interview with Carleon, she lost her way. Had she trusted to St. Peter, he would have taken her straight to Mme. Jean's, but she had hold of his hand and he gave himself up to her guidance.

A gust of rain—the wildest yet, dashed blindingly into their faces. The wind made the umbrella useless. St. Peter had given it up to Kildee, while he wrapped his coat about his beloved fiddle. Kildee looked about her. She was near a house that seemed unoccupied. There was no light to be seen in it, and by the gleam of the distant street lamp she saw that it bore the green placard which meant “for sale.”

She hurriedly tried the gate, found it unlatched, and went in, followed by St. Peter. They found shelter in the old, vine-hung piazza. They sat on the floor, for they were weary, and St. Peter required to be soothed. Presently a carriage was driven to the door. They had seen the carriage standing a little further on under the shelter of a thick-leaved tree that grew on the sidewalk. Was it waiting for some one who was in this dark, unoccupied-looking house? Kildee could hear the driver muttering, and the horses stamping the wet street. Directly she heard light steps coming along the hall inside; the door was softly opened and two muffled figures came out. They were Hazard Hall and Miss Montcalm. They stood waiting until the shower had passed, never suspecting the presence of the two who sat near them, concealed by the gloom and the shadows of the vines.

It was then that Kildee heard Hazard express his intention to search the Red House and bring Heathcliff's “guilty secret” to light. She had no idea what this secret was; she had no distrust of Heathcliff. She never once gave credence to the thought that he could be “guilty” of anything evil or dishonorable. “It is an enemy plot-



ting to injure him; I detect revengeful triumph in his tones," thought the girl. "As early as possible to-morrow, I will see him and warn him," she said to herself.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

BUT though Kildee was at the mayor's house next morning at eight o'clock, he had already left the city on the early western train. He had gone to attend a political meeting at Milan, a town twenty miles from Wallport. The meeting was most important. A great crowd was expected, for the two opposing candidates for the highest state office were, for the first time, to be pitted against each other. Many of the Wallport people were on the train, going out to be present at the contest. Representatives of the city press and correspondents of other papers were there with wide-open eyes and ears and busy pencils. Among these was Hazard Hall. The young journalist was in buoyant spirits. There was to be an afternoon issue of "The Rattler," to which he would telegraph the proceedings of the meeting. The edition would be large, for it would contain (Hazard trusted) a fatal bomb for Heathcliff—the announcement that General Montcalm had consented to be run as independent candidate for governor. Hazard had already prepared this announcement with flaring capitals and headlines, so confident was he of the result of Honor's declaration to her father that she would not marry Heathcliff. He had shown what he had written to the chief of "The Rattler," who had engaged to call upon the general and urge him to verify the announcement of his candidacy at once, as no time was to be lost. The independent side had only two months in which to work.

Hazard was still in suspense. His scheme to search the Red House to-day had to be postponed for twenty-four hours because of this important meeting at Milan. Also he



could not be *sure* what General Montcalm would do. However, he was sanguine in both respects. He meant to be back in Wallport in a few hours. By two o'clock the speaking would be over. He would take the train that passed through Milan at that hour and reach the city in time to see General Montcalm himself before "The Rattler" went to press. He knew his influence over the general. Young though he was, his shrewd insight, his impetuous will, his dash and daring, had captivated the old warrior-statesman. He could hardly hold out against the arguments and persuasion of his favorite.

The assemblage at Milan amounted almost to a mass meeting. There were speeches: first light skirmish popping, then heavy guns.

Norton's well-preserved, portly presence filled the speakers' stand for nearly an hour. He made a graceful, oily address, starred with brilliant points and plausible argument. He was a wily politician and a practiced speaker, but the people knew him of old. A feeling that he was not to be trusted blunted the point of his elquence and his sarcasm.

When Heathcliff rose there was a murmur of applause. His political record was short and not especially brilliant. He had served his state in her legislative assembly during several terms, and filled the post faithfully and ably. It was known that it had not benefited him pecuniarily. Money he could not want; his income from his mills and the rent from his houses amounted to many thousands. He had a reputation for solid integrity, for justice and liberality. He had not given lavishly, but wisely, to public enterprises of industry and of charity. He was a man—so looked upon—to be relied on as a safe if not a brilliant head of state affairs.

His presence alone helped to inspire this feeling. The tall, massive figure, the fine head on columnar throat, the calm, searching eye, the deep, tranquil tones—these seemed



tokens of a man strong enough to bear the burdens of state. His speech seemed the fit expression of such a man. Simple in its form, bare of ornate rhetoric, almost devoid of personality, but clear, comprehensive, informed with the power of earnest conviction, it was hailed as a masterpiece of large insight and manly feeling.

When the applause died away and Hazard Hall's boyish face and willowy but well-knit figure was seen on the speaker's stand, and it was found he was about to speak in opposition to Heathcliff, he was at first hardly listened to; but he forced attention by the grace of his presence and the daring of his utterances. He was opposed to both candidates. He roundly asserted that neither was the man for the position; that neither should or would win in the race.

"Wait for the dark horse," he cried; "the pure thorough-bred; the war-horse with his neck clothed with the thunder of many victories on actual fields of combat and on the battle-grounds of state; wait, and you shall see how easily he will distance this plebeian stock."

He flashed his scathing satire along the past political record of Norton and then he turned its edge upon Heathcliff. He knew that sarcasm and insinuation were the only weapons he could use against the Mayor of Wallport. He rang the changes on the grasping ambition of the rich man, who, not content with having coined his thousands out of the sweat of the laboring poor, now wanted to mount to political eminence upon their votes. He ridiculed what he called the Sunday-school record of Heathcliff. He pictured him as a second Pank's patron, a condescending patriarchal Pharisee, dispensing tracts and blessings instead of bread to poor tenants and employés, whose rents he was careful not to lower and whose wages he piously refrained from raising lest their pride should be puffed up.

Satire, however false, always tells, at least for the instant. Hazard's speech was as brilliant and spicy as it was



unjust. It created laughter and applause. Presently, however, the applause changed to hisses. The listeners detected personal venom under the rattling ridicule. Hazard turned to leave the stand with a flushed brow, but he faced the crowd again and cried out with fierce energy:

“Time will verify what I have said. In a little while the people of this State will see the moral veil torn from their Mokanna idol. I make no groundless prophecy. I say what I know.”

There was some applause; then a storm of hisses, and cries of “Heathcliff! Heathcliff!”

The man so audaciously attacked had sat with unmoved face during the bitter speech. Outwardly immobile as granite, yet the swift, hurling sarcasms had stung him deeply. Resentment was the first feeling to spring up under them. They came from one he had secretly aided with money and influence. They came from the son of a woman who had wronged him cruelly. It was in his power by a few words to humiliate this daring youngster, and his first impulse was to do it. The impulse passed before Hazard’s speech was over. When at length he came forward in response to repeated calls, the little speech he made was calm and controlled. His allusion to his youthful detractor, though it carried a sting of quiet irony, was tolerant and dignified. It was as though a buffalo brushed a gad-fly from his withers. Satire, rather than truth, he said, was the weapon of youth and inexperience. It was showy, but superficial. The young man would learn to use it more discriminately when he was older.

“Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers.” Then while Hazard inwardly writhed under his quiet tolerance, which seemed to mean contempt, he passed on to other points. The attack had warmed him into magnetism. This little spontaneous speech was full of contagious feeling, and the applause was enthusiastic.



The meeting closed with a barbecue, in the midst of which feast came the noon express train, and a number of Wallport people, among them Hazard Hall, returned to the city. Norton also went. He wanted to get there in time to prepare for a reception that was to be given him that evening."

Heathcliff remained until later. He returned at six o'clock on the passenger train. A crowd accompanied him to the cars. Their huzzas came to his ears as the train bore him away.

It was an hour of triumph, and Heathcliff's pulses beat more quickly than was their wont. He was thinking how Honor would glory in his success of to-day. Ambition had always been a master impulse of his nature; but he had hitherto held it in check. Now he felt that there was danger of its becoming a feverish thirst. The deep passion he felt for Honor Montcalm had reacted on his whole being. For her sake he coveted honors; for her sake he determined to win the present political goal, no matter what obstacle barred his way.

There seemed no obstacle now worth dreading. His way seemed clear to election, and then the people's confidence should not be disappointed; he would do good work for his State. Grand schemes rose dimly before his mind. His spirit was dwelling on the heights. Did he not remember that such exalted moments often presage a fall?

The train stopped at the depot in Wallport. Heathcliff was helping a bewildered old woman, with many baskets and bundles, off the train, when a newsboy sung out behind him:

"Evening extra of 'The Rattler.' General Montcalm out as independent candidate for governor."

He turned sharply round, bought a paper and unfolded it before the gas-jet, and found the double heads of the column which announced that General Alexander Montcalm had at last yielded to the demands of his friends, and con-



sented to come forward as a candidate for election on the independent platform.

What could this mean? Heathcliff would not believe that the announcement was genuine. It was the work of "The Rattler," he thought—a plot to injure his cause. General Montcalm would not do this thing: he would not oppose himself to the man his daughter was about to marry. The newspaper assertion had an ugly look of positiveness; still he believed it was an electioneering trick on the part of "The Rattler."

This belief was put to flight by the first words uttered by a friend whom he ran upon as he left the depot. This man had spoken with the general only an hour before.

"Montcalm don't seem inclined to talk about the matter," he said, "but he admitted that he authorized the announcement, and says that his decision was made not two hours before 'The Rattler' went to press. It's bad for our side. We shall have to work twice as hard. This will draw off many a vote from our cause. The general has the confidence of our party, and there'll be plenty to follow the lead. The split will be all benefit for Norton since it divides the votes opposed to him. He's in town to-day; made a syllabuby speech that his posse cheered like forty. Judge Blair gives him a reception to-night. The Blair mansion is illuminated in his honor, as you can see from here."

The mayor glanced at the lighted house on a distant eminence, but he was hardly conscious of seeing it. Surprise, pain, bewilderment at this sudden turn affairs had taken absorbed his faculties. Outwardly, he was as impassive as ever.

"A cool fellow, that Heathcliff," thought his friend, as he walked away. "That news would have moved a man of ice. Touches his heart too in a tender spot, I should say. This new move will clash with his suit to the general's daughter. And rumor has it they are to be married



next week. Wish I dared ask him about it; but one can never be familiar with Heathcliff."

When he reached home the mayor threw himself in his easy-chair, and tried to think calmly on the possible causes and the consequences of this strange movement on the part of his prospective father-in-law. But the surprise made him restive, and without changing his dress or tasting the supper that was brought him, he went to General Montcalm's. The servant who answered his ring said that his master was tired and begged to be excused.

"Very well," said Heathcliff, giving no sign of his annoyance. "Tell Miss Honor that I am here."

"She is not at home, sir. She has gone to the reception at Mr. Blair's."

The announcement almost staggered Heathcliff. He had written Honor a note before he went away, telling her he would return this evening and would come to see her; and she had gone, and left no note, no message for him! And gone to Judge Blair's—to a reception given a man who was his personal enemy as well as his political opponent. She knew his estimate of Norton—that he believed him to be a political trickster and a man without principle. She knew that he had lately discovered Norton to be the instigator of anonymously published slanders against himself. What was the meaning of this strange conduct on the part of his betrothed—this outrage of his feelings at the very time when her father had dealt such a blow to his political prospects? Only last night she had given him so sweet a smile; she had flashed upon him such a rare glance of tenderness when she received his flowers on the stage. For the first time she had seemed openly to acknowledge the relation between them. What had happened since then? Had she been hurt that he did not remain at the concert hall and accompany her home? He must see her, must know the truth.

From General Montcalm's house he went straight to the



illuminated mansion in which his opponent was enjoying a reception. Honor was there, and he must see her to-night. There was some party bitterness between him and Judge Blair, but no personal unfriendliness. And little, gay, dressy Mrs. Blair was one of his warmest admirers. He entered the shrubberied grounds and approached the house, stopping close to the veranda in the shadow cast by a Scotch fir-tree. He had a view of the brilliantly lighted interior; the long windows of the drawing-room were open to the floor. At first he saw nothing of Honor, but presently she came in view and stopped with her companion just before a window. She was leaning on the arm of a cavalier who bent over her with an air of devotion. Heathcliff set his teeth when he saw that this was Norton. Plausible, polished and entertaining as this man was, how could she listen to him with such flattering attention when she knew his real character?

He had never seen her look as she did to-night—flushed, excited, with that restless, flashing look in her dark eyes. As he watched her, he saw young Hazard Hall make his way to her side and ask her hand, it appeared, for a waltz, the lovely music of which was just begun. Would she waltz, when she knew how he disapproved it? At least she would not waltz with that upstart Bohemian, whose pen had overflowed with bitter comments upon her affianced husband.

Heathcliff saw that she hesitated. Her face had changed, clouded when she turned and saw Hazard. When he preferred his request she seemed about to refuse it coldly, but he bent nearer; his daring, yet adoring look fixed itself steadily—significantly, Heathcliff thought—upon her. She yielded and allowed him to take her hand and lead her away. A moment afterward Heathcliff saw them whirl by the window—the dark, brilliant young journalist and the fair, stately girl. They seemed well-matched in youth and beauty, while he—he was grave and worn with early strug-



gles. — He had a sudden, sickening fear that he was no match for this beautiful young girl.

Perhaps she had never loved him, had bound herself to him through ambition or because it was her father's wish. If he could see her! He *must* see her.

Chance favored him. Mrs. Blair came out on the veranda holding the hand of her little girl, and dropped wearily into a seat near the pillar close to which Heathcliff stood. He leaned his arm upon the balustrade and dropped a stalk of Japan lilies into her lap. He had gathered them for Honor as he passed through his yard. The lady turned her head and uttered a little cry of delighted surprise when she saw who it was.

"Come in; come right in," she said. "I am more glad than astonished."

"I have not my 'wedding garment' on, dear madame. I will tell you why I came."

"To see *me*, of course."

"No, not this time. I knew you were busy with the claims of others and would not have intruded. I came to see Miss Montcalm, just a moment, on a matter of importance. Will you take her a message?"

"I will send her to you if you will come in. Come to my little sitting-room; there is nobody there but Pug and the parrot. I will send Honor in there on some pretext. It will be a nice surprise when she finds you there."

She had run down the broad steps and put her hand through his arm. She led him to her tiny private sitting-room and placed him in a chair out of sight of any one entering the room because of a tall vase of flowers.

"Now you can rise up when she comes and see her blushing surprise."

Heathcliff feared there would be very little delight in her surprise. He heard the door open, heard the rustle of her dress, and rose with an agitation that was new to him.

"Honor, dearest, you did not think to see me here?"



She gave a slight start; then she seemed to grow taller. She stepped back as he came toward her and stood looking at him, very pale, but with her head held proudly erect, her eyes steady in their haughty repulsion.

“Honor, what is the meaning of this—you are not glad to see me?”

She did not speak immediately. Her eyes faltered under his look of pained surprise. At length she said:

“Yes, I am glad to see you, Mr. Heathcliff. This unexpected meeting gives me an opportunity to return you this ring you once put on my finger, and to tell you that henceforth we are merely acquaintances, or better still, strangers.”

She dropped the ring into his hand as she spoke, and slightly bending her head, she turned to go, but he seized her arm and drew her back almost fiercely:

“Explain this thing,” he said hoarsely.

“Take your hand from my arm, Mr. Heathcliff; I will not stay to explain; there is no explanation needed. You may see your dismissal in any light you please; only remember that it is final.”

“Honor, this is worse than childish. You can not mean it. Do you remember that you are almost my wife—that you are to be married to me in five days from now?”

“I will never be married to you, Mr. Heathcliff.”

“Then I must know the reason why. You must tell me why you have proved traitor to your word.”

Her lip curled.

“The less we say of traitors the better,” she said. “I have told you that you may assign what reason you like for my act—caprice, heartlessness. Oh! no need to pretend ignorance; you *know* the cause. Go; and remember that you have lost *Honor*.”

Her bitter tone emphasized the play on the word “Honor.” She bent her head in token that the interview was ended, and turned from him.



“My dear Honor,” said Mrs. Blair, fluttering to the door. “What shall I do? Here is Mr. Norton hunting for you everywhere. He says you promised him this dance—shall I ask him to excuse you?”

“By no means. I am quite ready to keep my promise.”

“But Mr. Heathcliff?”

“Our interview is at an end. I have just said good-night to him,” she answered, as she passed through the hall on her way to the ball-room. Heathcliff thought her tones sounded gay and heartless. He did not know that intense nervous excitement sustained her as strong wine might do. What she had seen last night was fresh before her. Her outraged pride, her scorn of his treachery blunted for the time the pangs of wounded love.

She had said to her father only this:

“He is not worthy to be your son or my husband. Do not ask me how I know this. I do know it, and I will never marry him.”

He did not question her. He had confidence in her judgment; and besides he felt that what she said was deeply earnest and final. Heathcliff felt the same when he listened to her words of dismissal. She was lost to him. Strong as he was, the blow almost stunned him. At a distance from the lights and music he slackened his rapid stride, and tried to think coherently, tried to conjecture what had caused the woman he worshiped and trusted—the woman who was almost his wife—to turn against him. Had she discovered his secret? The fear went through him like cold steel. If that secret were found out, then more was at forfeit than the love of Honor Montcalm—the safety, the life of a woman who was dear to him—his own hard-earned good name, nay, his own safety. But it could not be that this secret was discovered. He had guarded it too well.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

THE reception at the Blair mansion, which had begun with the brass-band music, speeches and a dinner at six, was still at its height. Yet when Heathcliff, half-stunned by the succession of reverses that had fallen upon him, stopped in the shadow of a tree that overhung the sidewalk to collect his thoughts, he saw Hazard Hall, whom he had left the gayest of the guests, pass him hurriedly arm in arm with a young man. Where the streets cornered, a few steps further, the two stopped.

“I say, Hall, let’s go to Bielman’s. His beer-garden is in full blast to-night. Old Cap sings a jolly song and red-haired Nettie dances. Come.”

“Can’t,” returned the other. “I have an appointment at ten, and I must see some men before that time. It’s nearly nine now. Nothing but important business could have torn me from the Blairs, I assure you.”

“Political, of course. You’ll be steeped to the chin in politics from now till election.”

“This is not politics, however, though it will have a strong bearing on the vote for governor. It is a bit of fine detective work,” said Hazard, whom wine had warmed into indiscretion. “Listen out to-morrow; you’ll hear a thunder-clap.”

“Why, what’s the mischief? You heat my curiosity to boiling-point. Tell me what you mean?”

“Sufficient for the day is the account thereof,” returned Hazard, with a laugh and a toss of the hand as he rushed away.

Heathcliff scarcely heeded what he had heard. He walked on with the uncertain step of one who had received a heavy blow. As he reached the brightly lighted heart of



the city, a sudden temptation rose up and plucked him by the sleeve. All his life he had struggled against an inherited craving—the craving for alcoholic stimulants. It had assailed him, as evil things do, in moments when the barricade of his will was weakened by fatigue or care; or when it was overthrown by some storm of sorrow. Hitherto he had battled against it successfully. Never, but once, had it gained even a temporary victory. To-night it came on the heels of his bitter and bewildering disappointment. As he hurried down the streets, he passed the doors of lighted liquor saloons. His pride forbade him to enter these, but presently he came to a hall opening on the street, brilliantly lighted, with large, richly curtained windows full of foliage and flowering plants. A little miniature fountain tossed up its perfumed waters. The notes of a piano and zither floated out from the further end of the hall, hid by light curtains of lace.

“Gentlemen’s Reading-Room” was the glittering sign over the door, but Heathcliff knew that this was but the fair-seeming bait of a gilded trap. He knew that the lace-hung vista concealed other attractions besides the latest newspapers and uncut magazines. A vision of red wines and the fire and frost of ice-cooled brandies, tinkling in crystal glasses, came to him as quenchers of the fire that burned at his heart. He had never entered the place in his life; now he paused before its open door. He hesitated, then he turned to go in.

Was it chance, or overruling Fate that interfered? A hand touched his arm. He turned and saw Kildee. A little factory boy, whom he knew, was her companion. In that hour of anguish and temptation, her kind smile, her sweet, tender face seemed the smile and face of the Angel of Consolation. He grasped her cool little hand in his hot fingers.

“Child, where are you going?”

“Home,” she said; “to Madame Jean’s. I have been



with Mrs. Barnes since six o'clock. She sent for me. She is no better. I am so glad I met you. I have been to your house twice to-day to see you and you were gone."

"You wanted to see me about something particular?"

"Yes, I wanted to see you about something very particular. Will you walk home with me, sir? It is but a little way."

"Assuredly; Johnny Betts, you can run home to your mother," said the mayor, dropping a coin into the hand of this shock-headed seventh of Mrs. Betts's "young ones."

He took the girl's hand and they walked on together—past the glowing windows and lace-draped vistas of the "Reading-Room"—past temptation.

There were no customers in the shop when they entered. Mine. Jean was putting things into the show-cases and on the shelves.

Kildee led Heathcliff to a little recess among the tall box-plants, and brought him a glass of sherbet. She had seen at once that he looked weary and troubled. She seated herself on a little ottoman at his feet.

"And now tell me your something particular," he said, with an effort to smile. "Is it something that worries you—something that I can help you in?"

She shook her head.

"It is not about myself," she answered; and she told him what she had heard the night before, while she was sheltered from the storm in the old building adjacent to the Red House.

He listened with an agitation he could not control. He understood at once that a spy had found the one unguarded loop-hole of his secret—the window facing another window in the house believed to be unoccupied. He felt almost sure who this spy was.

"Did you recognize the man's voice," he asked, not expecting an affirmative answer.



“Yes; it was the voice of a young man I knew when I was a child. He lived in the lodging-house where the woman who claimed to be my mother left me. He was Lottie’s friend. He went away, but I saw him a month ago, when our troupe were at Rock Springs. I have seen him here several times passing along the streets, and once he bought some bananas of me. I do not think he recognized me.”

“And his name?”

“Hazard Hall.”

The mayor had felt this would be the reply. And the woman with him he was sure was Honor Montcalm. But this consciousness gave hardly a wound. Apprehension banished jealousy. A sudden thought almost paralyzed him with its suggestion of near danger to one he loved. That appointment at ten, that “bit of nice detective work” which Hall had spoken of not fifteen minutes ago. What could it mean but this?—the Red House was to be searched at ten—the hour the Sphinx had occupied it when the spy had seen her. It wanted now not an hour to the time—too late for escape. The house was watched, of course.

“She is lost,” he said, striking his brow with his clinched hand. He forgot the presence of Kildee. He sprung to his feet and walked the floor, trying to think of some plan to save her he loved. His knitted brow and compressed lips revealed his anguish to Kildee; she followed his movements with pitying eyes.

He caught her wistful look at length. He stopped and looked at her. He wondered to see no distrust in her frank eyes. He went up to her.

“What must you think of me after what you heard in that house, and after you have seen the way it has affected me? You must believe I am a hypocrite and a bad man.”

“I do not think so,” she answered, simply.



“But you doubt me?” She gave him a long, steady look.

“I do not doubt you,” she said.

“God bless you, my child,” he uttered, turning away, while his lip trembled. “If my promised wife had only had such faith in me,” he thought.

He turned to her again. A sudden resolve had come to him.

“Kildee,” he said, “I have a secret, a strange one, full of sadness and danger. I ought to tell you this secret to confirm your belief in me.”

“You need not; it will be painful to you. I believe you have not done any wrong. Do not tell me anything—unless I can help you. Can I not do something?”

“You? no, sweet child; what could you do? And yet your intuitions are so clear—like a child’s. If you knew, perhaps— Kildee, by your noble trust in me, you have earned a right to my full confidence. I will tell you this secret.”

He sat down close to her. In brief words he told her the story of a life that he had unexpectedly and strangely found linked to his own, a life which circumstances had put in fearful jeopardy, necessitating instant and skillful concealment. And now this concealment was about to be penetrated; suspicion was aroused; the eyes of trained detectives were, without doubt, watching the house; in less than an hour it would be searched. What could be done?

Kildee sat thinking, her little hands clasped tightly upon her knees.

“Do you know who was the woman that watched the house with Hazard Hall last night?” she inquired at length.

“I think I do.”

“Did she or Mr. Hall ever see the—the concealed lady before she was a fugitive?”

Heathcliff hesitated reflectingly.



“No,” he said, “they had never seen her I am almost sure.”

“They would not be able to identify her then. They have only seen her at night in a dim light across a considerable space. They may even have had but a glimpse at her face. Some one else, dressed as she was, and disguised to resemble her, might— Stop!” she cried, interrupting herself, with sparkling eyes and heightened color. “We have no time to waste in talking. Let us act. Mr. Heathcliff, will you trust me to try to help you? Will you let me carry out a plan that has come into my head? Do not ask me what it is, please.”

“My little loyal heart! it may be something that will injure you.”

“Oh, no. I do not think so. Don’t be afraid for me. I take it for granted I have your permission. Now only one question: How can I get into the Red House? You tell me the gate is always locked.”

“There is a bell which an old negro janitor will answer. Whisper into his ear ‘Ich Dien,’ and he will admit you.”

“That is simple enough, and now trust me, and leave me to my little scheme. Go and find out if your suspicions are well grounded; I mean if the house is really to be searched to-night. Do not be so sad, dear friend. Hope for the best.”

He kissed the little hand she held out to him. “My angel of consolation,” he said, and he did not note how the blood rushed to her cheeks. She turned quickly to hide it and disappeared into the inner room. Heathcliff left the shop, stopping to say a word concerning an order for fruit to M. Jean, who had come out to shut up the shop.

Kildee had meantime run into the little kitchen, where the Irishwoman who had been hired to wash that day lay snoring on a cot. On a chair lay the woman’s clothes. Kildee caught up a long, rusty sack and a sun-bonnet, put



them on in a twinkling, picked up a basket, ran lightly up to her room and took some articles from her trunk and put them into the basket; then she went softly down to the shop. M. Jean, who was putting up the shutters, turned and saw her, but supposed it was the wash-woman, Mrs. Mahoney, who had concluded to go home. She hurried along the sidewalk, imitating Mrs. Mahoney's swinging gait, and stopped at the next crossing to wait for a street car, which would take her within a block of the Red House. She knew where it was—she had gone there early this morning, for after her adventure the night before the place became a haunting mystery to her.

In less than a minute she saw the green lights and heard the jingling bells of the street car. There were not many passengers, and these paid no attention to her. Sheltered by the long gingham bonnet, she sat in her corner, until the place was reached where she must leave the car. She got out and walked rapidly until the dark mass of high terrace and brick wall and tree-tops which concealed the Red House came in sight. Sure enough there was a man pacing in front of the house. She once more imitated the Irishwoman's gait and walked on with an assured step and a fluttering heart. She stopped at the iron gate and pulled the bell. The man wheeled and approached her. He stepped close to her, and eyed her searchingly. She was glad that the sun-bonnet had such depths of shadow and the sack such swaddling folds.

It was not two minutes (though it almost seemed as many hours) before the old negro came shuffling down the walk in answer to the bell. Before he could speak she exclaimed, coarsening her voice and fitting her accent to her dress:

“You're powerful slow gittin' here. Do you think I want to wait all night?”

He peered at her through the iron bars in astonishment. Quick as thought, she dipped her head and whispered in his ear “Ich Dien.” He gave a start and a kind of snort



of astonishment; then he slowly unlocked the door, and with mutterings and head-shakings admitted the visitor who had given the mysterious password.

Apparently satisfied that she was a servant belonging to the house, the detective turned on his heel and walked on smoking his cigar.

“Show me at once to your mistress. My business is important,” Kildee said to the negro.

He went ahead, ascended the broad granite steps that led into the gloomy, ivied veranda and unlocked the front door. He led her along the hall to a room at the lower end; there he knocked. It was some seconds before a voice inside gave the permission to “come in.”

Kildee found herself in the presence of the mysterious mistress of the Red House.

Miss Faust lifted her crooked figure from the depths of an arm-chair. The veil of thin gray gauze hung before her face, but through it could be seen the purple mark covering one half her face, the large nose, the bright eyes behind the blue glasses.

She looked at Kildee in surprise, it seemed in agitation, for she attempted to speak, and checked herself, turning to Caleb.

“Dis here woman giv de curus password at de gate, else she neber got inside, ma’am,” declared the old negro.

“I have important business with you, madame. “Please dismiss your servant,” said Kildee.

Miss Faust started to hear the refined accents and silvery tones so at variance with the dress. With a gesture she sent Caleb from the room. Kildee flung off the sun-bonnet and came close to her.

“It is no time to stand on ceremony,” she said. “I came from Mr. Heathcliff; he has honored me with his confidence, and I am here to help him and you, if I can. This house is to be searched in less than half an hour. The object is to find a lady who was seen last night in an upper



room at the back of the house. Those who saw her had never known her before she sought—retirement. There is a chance to deceive them by a stratagem. I am here to personate that lady. Will you show me the room she was in, and let me have the dress she wore last night? I have with me the other materials for perfecting the disguise.”

For a breath’s time the deformed woman stood staring at her, with hands pressed convulsively together, and spoke no word. Then her hands fell at her side; she uttered a low moan.

“It has come,” she said, presently.

“Oh, don’t give up; have courage,” urged Kildee. “Above all, be quick—for your sake.”

“*My* sake!” she repeated bitterly. “It has come; let it fall; I am weary of the struggle. Death is better—oh, far, far better. Even *that* death.”

“You must not feel so. You must exert yourself to keep up the concealment—for *his* sake, Mr. Heathcliff’s. Discovery would be ruin to him.”

She lifted her head, then light came back to her eyes.

“Come on,” she said to Kildee. “For his sake I would do anything.”

She led the way upstairs, with a swift, gliding step strangely incongruous with her decrepit figure and white hair. They entered the bed-chamber, which, as Hazard had conjectured, connected with the little boudoir in which he had seen the yellow-haired Sphinx. Miss Faust then threw open a large *armoire*, revealing beautiful evening dresses hanging inside. She took out one of pale-blue French crêpe, and gave it to Kildee. The girl quickly divested herself of the Irishwoman’s sack, and put on the delicate blue dress. It was too large in the waist; she dexterously lapped it over and pinned it; it was too long in front; she skillfully caught it up at either side, and pinned the loops so as to make them seem intentional folds. The length behind did not matter; it only added a little to the



trailing volume of delicate lace-edged frills. She caught up her basket, took out something, and stepped to the mirror. In a trice her short, dark curls were covered with a wig of flowing golden hair—she had worn it last on the stage. She opened the box of fine French powder she had brought and made her face white as a cherry blossom. Then she hid the darkness of her delicate eyebrows by a golden paste and turned to Miss Faust.

“A blonde at your service,” she said, with a little smile and bow meant to be reassuring.

The peal of a bell came faintly to their ears.

“They are here,” cried Miss Faust; “oh, God help me! Why did not Heathcliff come?”

“He will be here presently, no doubt. Ah, let us be brave, dear lady. Let us carry it off boldly. Go down to your room and meet them. I will be in that room where the spies saw the fugitive lady. Does this door lead to it? No, no, do not come with me. Go down at once.”

Old Caleb had lighted his pipe and seated himself in the chimney-corner to enjoy his “night-cap smoke” and to meditate over the strangeness of the fact that a woman had to-night given the open sesame to the Red House—the password that had never, during the seven years of his janitorship, been uttered by any one beside his mistress’s business manager, Ira Heathcliff.

“Once in seven years things allers takes a turn,” he muttered.

A clang of the gate-bell caused him to start up.

“’Tain’t Mr. Heathcliff’s ring,” he muttered.

Clang, clang!—a quick, impatient peal.

The short-stemmed pipe fell from Caleb’s mouth.

“Name o’ peace, who kin it be?” he exclaimed, and he made his way to the gate as fast as his unequally matched legs could take him.

His dismay was great on beholding four men at the gate and hearing their demand:



“Open in the name of the law.”

The sight of the buttons and “billies” of two city guardians operated as potently as the muzzle of a pistol would have done. The iron gate swung open and a deputy-sheriff, Hazard Hall and two policemen entered. The two latter had been engaged alternately in watching the Red House during the past twenty-four hours.

“Not a soul has left the house,” they reported to Hazard, “except that sooty, surly watch-dog the nigger. He hobbled out in the morning, locked the gate behind him and came back in about an hour. Not a half hour ago, an old woman went in—a common Biddy-looking body, in a long sun-bonnet, with a basket on her arm. She’s in there yet.”

“Mistis will be scared out of her wits,” thought Caleb, as he opened the front-door for these unwelcome night visitors. They followed him along the hall.

“Miss Faust is here in her room,” and he rapped on the door. The knock was promptly responded to. The posse entered. The mistress of the Red House rose as they came in. She was richly dressed in black silk, relieved with fine white lace. In spite of her disfigured face and deformed shape, there was something impressive, attractive in her bearing—a majesty—a mystery.

“To what do I owe this unexpected visit?” she asked.

The deputy stepped forward and handed her the legal permit to search her house and premises, founded on the declaration of one Hazard Hall, that, to the best of his belief, the criminal, Mrs. Montcalm, was concealed therein. Hazard, leaning against the door and watching the lady closely, detected a tremor of the silvery veil that fell over her face, but when she spoke her voice was controlled. Its keen, harp-like note (foreign of accent) was accentuated by sarcasm.

“I suppose I must yield to the majesty of the law, which



authorizes this intrusion at the instigation of—" Her eyes ran over the group and rested upon Hazard.

He bowed in his half-mocking way, but in spite of his self-assurance he felt uneasy under the quiet irony of her manner.

"Perform your task, sirs," she said, with a wave of her hand. "Search the premises, search the house from bottom to top. You shall have the keys to every room, every closet. Get them," she said to the negro woman, whom she had summoned by a touch of a bell on the table beside her.

The officer received the bunch of keys in his hand. He looked a trifle sheepish as he turned away. Hazard was glad to leave the presence of Miss Faust.

"Come at once to the secret boudoir," he cried, springing up the stairs. "I can find it, I know. It is likely we need not search any further. She will be found there or in the adjoining bedroom."

They followed him up the stairway into the wide upper corridor, lined with rooms on either side. They turned to the left, passed down the hall, treading lightly on the soft carpet at a sign from Hazard, and entered the last room at the rear. It was vacant. There was a door in the right hand corner of the room. They found the key and opened the door. It admitted them into a semi-detached portion of the house, which, seen from the outside, had a tower-like appearance. It had a trap roof, and consisted of two rooms in each story, fitted with large, long windows, guarded by venetian blinds and jalousies. The room they entered was a bed-chamber, furnished in pearl color and gold, and seeming a fit nest for beauty. Hazard gave a quick glance around, saw the open *armoire*, stepped to the dressing-case and picked up a hair-pin Kildee had left, saw the box of perfumed powder, a toilet-bottle exhaling jasmine odor, and a knot of pale ribbon.

"Eureka!" he cried; "the bird is close by, here are some of its feathers; come." He darted to the door of the



other room—the boudoir where the blonde Mystery had received her visitor at this house. He opened the door softly. A woman stood with her back to him, idly pulling the petals of a rose that swung its creamy censer from a porphyry vase. She was dressed in blue, a mass of golden hair was caught up above her white neck by a pin, whose dagger-shaped handle was studded with pearls. “It is she,” he said, below his breath. He recognized the dress, the hair, the pearl-studded dagger-pin.

The three other men had entered noiselessly. One of them coughed; the lady turned. She gave a start of surprise; then she raised herself haughtily erect.

“How dare you intrude into this room?” she demanded. “Who are you? Robbers?”

“No,” answered Hazard. “We came to carry out the law, not to break it. We are armed with a warrant to arrest Mrs. Laura Montcalm on the charge of murder.”

He had fully expected to see her turn livid; to hear her shriek, drop on her knees, and beg for mercy. She did nothing of the kind. She only arched her brows in scornful surprise.

“Indeed! and did you expect to find Mrs. Montcalm here? Now I know that you are *not* robbers: you are escaped lunatics.”

Hazard turned in bewilderment to the officer.

“Is not this Mrs. Montcalm?” he asked.

“It certainly is not,” said the other, emphatically; “barring the yellow hair and the white skin and the way she carries her head, she is no more like Mrs. Montcalm than you are.”

“It is false!” cried Hazard; “it must be. You never knew the woman. Speak, you two,” turning to the policemen, “you say you both knew Mrs. Montcalm; is not this she?”

“It is not,” replied both in the same breath. “Mrs. Montcalm was taller than this lady,” added one of the



men; "and older-looking—not the same by a long jump. I can swear to that."

"Of course you can," said the deputy. "If this is the woman you spied on, your reasons for suspicion fall to the ground; and all we've got to do is to apologize and get out of here."

Hazard was bitterly disappointed, bitterly mortified. Defeat was hard for him to bear.

"The devil!" he burst out, turning his back upon the woman in blue. "Apologize to *her*; a woman who hides from the light of day and receives a hypocritical—"

He stopped short. He had suddenly caught a view of Kildee's face and figure in the long mirror. Instantly, through the association of ideas, it flashed upon him who she was. Just so, in that blonde wig and a trailing blue dress had she looked when he peeped into the stage dressing-room at Rock Springs to say good-bye to her and saw her (in the mirror), dressed as the Countess in the "Lover's Test," and waiting to be summoned to the stage.

As swiftly as the recollection came he wheeled and looked straight into her face.

"You are Kildee," he cried; "you are Max's protégée."

At his first words she changed countenance, but she quickly recovered herself.

"I am Kildee," she said.

"Max has been looking for you everywhere. He begged me to hunt for you here. I have found you, but it will not be pleasant for him to know *how*."

"What do you mean?" faltered Kildee.

For the first time she had a sense of the construction that might be put upon the position she had placed herself in through her loyalty to her friend.

Hazard smiled with a sad bitterness. Suddenly his face darkened with a scowl.

"Ask that man," he cried.



His eyes were turned to the door. Kildee looked around and saw Heathcliff.

The mayor took in the scene at a glance—Hazard's scornful look, Kildee's burning blush—but he did not comprehend its import. He saw that Kildee was troubled.

“What do you mean by your presence here?” he demanded, turning to Hazard. “I have heard from Miss Faust why you came. You have failed in your object, why do you linger to annoy this lady?”

Hazard Hall made a mock obeisance.

“We have failed of one object,” he said, “but we have succeeded in another. We came thinking to secure a criminal and to unmask a hypocrite. We have failed in the one part of our purpose; we have succeeded in the other. I am sorry because of this girl, whom I knew, but for you—”

Heathcliff's face grew suddenly white and troubled. He comprehended Hazard's meaning. He understood the wrong his little friend had done herself through her generous impulse to help him. And he had permitted it; innocently, it is true, but he felt the keen thrust of self-reproach. There was but one way to remedy the wrong. He stepped to Kildee's side; he took her hand in his; he fixed his grave, stern eyes upon young Hall.

“I pass over your contemptuous barking at me,” he said, “not for your sake, however. But you shall not by your insinuation insult this lady—my betrothed wife. Retract that insinuation at once.”

“Your betrothed wife!” Hazard repeated the words in utter amazement. “Then you were playing false to—”

“Silence, sir. I did not ask you to address another word to me. I demanded that you retract your implied insult to this lady—my intended wife.”

Hazard Hall bit his lip till the blood came, in his effort to control his anger that boiled under the cool scorn of Heathcliff's eye. But he was not devoid of manliness.



“I do retract,” he said at last, turning to Kildee. “Not at the command of that haughty man, but for your sake, little Kildee. I gladly take back any implied detraction of you. Forgive me, and pardon my intrusion here. Good-night.”

He bowed before the silent, statuesque girl and quitted the room. The others followed. Kildee and Heathcliff were left in the Sphinx’s boudoir.

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### CHAPTER XXXIII.

FOR a moment neither spoke. Heathcliff still held her hand. She made a motion to withdraw it, and this movement aroused him. He felt now that her hand was trembling; he clasped it more closely, and turned to her.

“My child,” he said, “I did very wrong to allow you to put yourself in this false position.”

“It was my own act,” she answered; “you did not even know what I intended doing.”

“I guessed it, yet I did not try to hinder you. I was so troubled for *her*, I caught at your little hand, so generously held out to help, and gave no thought to what might be the consequences to you.”

“Do not think of it now; do not blame yourself. I know I have not done wrong! I ought not to mind if it seems wrong to others. He said he would tell M—my friends. They will not believe it, and if they do—I—”

Her voice trembled and broke.

“Kildee,” interposed Heathcliff, quickly “Did you not understand? No one can think anything wrong *now*. I had a right to visit my betrothed—to keep her retired if I liked and it pleased her. You will pardon my presumption in saying what I did to Hazard Hall. It was best.”

“I am sorry you said it, Mr. Heathcliff.”

“Why, Kildee?”



“It was not true. I did not feel afraid of letting the truth stand as it was. Some time they would have known I had not done wrong.”

“I could not let you bear the burden of the doubt, Kildee. And I thought—I hoped—you might make it true.”

She looked up at him with wide eyes. Every shade of color had gone from her face.

“You did not mean—” She began and stopped. The color came in a warm tide, melting over cheeks and brow. He laid his hands lightly on her shoulders.

“Kildee,” he said, “did you think I tried to shield you with a sham? Did you think I took the sacred word ‘wife’ on my lips in mere subterfuge? I own that I spoke on a moment’s impulse, that I spoke to shield you; but I meant my words to stand true—if you would permit it.”

“I will not permit it,” she cried.

He saw that she was strongly agitated—that she shrunk from him.

“I see I have presumed too far,” he said sadly. “I am too old, too grave for you, my bright little one. But, Kildee, listen to me. I do not ask you to love me. I will not hold you bound to me in fact. Though you take the marriage vow, you shall be free as before. I only wish you to bear my name as a safe-guard; I only ask for the right to protect and care for you.”

“To bear your name—your honored name, Mr. Heathcliff! Do you forget *I* have no name, no family? I am only a waif. No, no; I could not let you sacrifice yourself to a mistaken sense of honor.”

“And if I told you—looking into your true eyes as I do now—that it was no sacrifice; that I held you in your sweet-souled, unstained maidenhood a fit match for any man under the arch of heaven? But, child, be frank with me. Even to shield you, I will not urge you to do a thing that revolts you. It is not fair in me, perhaps, to ask you to link your fresh young life to my worn and saddened one.



If you had a home, if you had parents or even a guardian, I would not ask it. But you are alone. It is not a bright lot I offer you as my wife, little one, but it is, I hope, a safe one. In my home you shall have the truest care and shelter."

"And you—" she said, looking up with wistful, searching eyes. "Would it make *you* happier to have me there—in your home?"

"It would, Kildee."

She put her hand in his without a word. He drew her to him and kissed her forehead with grave tenderness. When he looked up, Miss Faust stood before them. He led Kildee to her, and said:

"This little girl will stay with you until I claim her for my own. She is to be my wife."

Miss Faust looked at him in silent amazement.

"Your wife!" she said at length. "Is she, then, Miss—"

"She is Kildee. You have often heard me speak of her."

Miss Faust darted a swift, keen look into his eyes through her pale-green glasses. But she could not read their clouded depths. Then her glance searched Kildee's face. She noted its changing color, the unsteadiness of the lips, the quiver of the eyelids. She went up to the girl and put an arm about her slim waist.

"I will take what care I can of her for your sake, and for hers. I will never forget what she has done to-night. She comes to a gloomy house, but she knows its wretched secret; and she does not shrink from me," she said softly, for Kildee's head lay against her bosom.

Heathcliff touched the little head caressingly.

"She is weary," he said. "It is late. Take her with you, dear, and see that she goes to bed at once. I will sit here awhile. Good-night, little friend; sleep sweetly, and have no bad dreams."



But it was long before Kildee slept. Miss Faust had taken her, not to the fine pearl-and-gold chamber, but to a less pretentious bedroom with quaintly carved foreign furniture. She lay wakeful, thinking of the strange changes in her life—of this last strangest change of all. She could not make it real. It seemed a dream to her—all the occurrences of this night. The coming in disguise to the mysterious Red House, the meeting with its unfortunate mistress, the rôle she, Kildee, had assumed with such outward self-assurance and such a fluttering heart, the encounter with Hazard and his cruel taunt; more than all it seemed dream-like to recall the words Mayor Heathcliff had spoken. Had he really called her his wife that would be? Had his lips really pressed her forehead? Had he said he loved her? No, he had not said that—not once. His manner to her had been kind, tender even, but it was tenderness that had in it no passion nor rapture. Yet, had he not said her presence in his home would make him happier? That should be enough. It was enough. It was more than she had ever dreamed she should hear. “I could not expect a noble, wise man like him to love me only as he does. I will be blessed beyond my deserving if I can make him happier,” murmured Kildee; and she presently slept with her arm thrown above her head, its round whiteness half buried in her short, dark curls.

Miss Faust found her so when she stole into the room a little later with her soft, gliding step. She stopped by the bed, shading the dim lamp with her hand, and looked for more than a minute at the sleeping girl.

“She is little more than a child,” she said; “but there is strength as well as sweetness in her face. Yet he does not love her. He is broken-hearted for the loss of the woman he still loves.”

She had just said good-night to Heathcliff and had looked after his retreating form as he passed down the tree-shadowed walk. She had gone out to him where he sat in



the dark, on the narrow iron balcony that jutted out from one of the windows of the boudoir. As she stole, unperceived to his side, she heard him sigh heavily. She came up to him and put her hand on his shoulder.

“What is this you have done, Ira? You were to marry Miss Montcalm. It was to be in less than a week; and now you say it is to be this girl. Has Honor Montcalm taken back her promise?”

“Do not ask me. Don’t question me about it, dear. It does not matter.”

“It does matter. Do I not see that you are miserable? And only last night you were so happy. There has come a terrible change, and I feel that is through me, miserable being that I am, born always to cast a shadow. Have I not been the cause? Ah, you will not speak. I know without your answer. It is because of me that Miss Montcalm has broken her promise; it is because of me that you are going to marry this girl you do not love. You will marry her as compensation for what she did to-night, or because it was compromising her. At the bottom of all there is the same cause—my own blighting and blighted self. Ira, why should I continue to hang like a poisonous fungus upon your life? Let me end it—let this miserable mummary cease. I have no right to jeopardize your safety, to destroy your happiness, your hard-earned good name. I will quit this house to-morrow night. I care not what becomes of me afterward. It has been a criminal weakness and cowardice that has made me stay here just to lean on you.”

“It has been by my advice; it has been for the best. It will continue to be for the best. Kildee has saved us. Through her stratagem suspicion had been disarmed. Her presence here accounts for what has been seen and heard; it will account for what may be seen here in the future, though we must be more cautious. Do not be morbid, my darling. After a time it will be safe to leave this place with



all the miserable memories it has for you and for me. We will go to a foreign land—you, Kildee, and I—and forget the dark trials we have passed through here.”

“But the sacrifices you make for me—oh, Ira, they—”

“They are made willingly. What we do for love’s sake, though it be bitter, has a sweetness of its own. Come, it is time I had left you—time you were in bed. Do not grieve over the inevitable. I have always gloried in your strength of soul, your philosophic resignation to the must be. Do not let me find you weak at this late hour.”

“I am weak. I am so tired of the struggle. Forgive me.”

She threw herself on his breast sobbing stormily. Not for long. She soon controlled her emotion. She lifted herself from his arms.

“I will not give way again,” she said, “forgive me. Come; I will go with you to the door and give you the duplicate key to the gate. You forgot and left it last night.”

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

AT nine o’clock next morning Honor was alone in her room. The excitement of pride and of that full draught of scorn she had drunk had sustained her as strong wine might do. But this stimulus was now dying out. She rose this morning after a wakeful night and faced life under its changed conditions, and she found that all the brightness of hope had gone out of it for her. How could she live on without the love that had been her happiness and her glory? She had not only lost that love, but she had lost her faith in a man she had so believed in, so honored. Her soul cried out after this lost belief in one who had stood for her as the type of strong and unstained manhood. How could she believe any one worthy since he had proved false? Could she trust his face again? She saw his face before her



now: the grave gentleness of the mouth, the calm, firm brow, the eyes that seemed to prison some intense, sad yearning. She had thought that touch of sadness was the shadow left by early struggle and privation; was it, instead, the shadow of hidden but conscious guilt—guilt artfully cloaked by that fair semblance of integrity which had deceived all men?

Could it indeed be guilt? Might not this apparent revelation be all a wretched mistake. She was ready to catch at any straw of hope. Might not that lighted tableau she had seen thrown on the background of night and storm be a delusion; some trick wrought by Hazard Hall to bring about his double purpose, political and personal? Might not she and her lover be the victims of a plot to separate them at this late hour when they were all but united?

Should she not have given Heathcliff an opportunity to defend himself, to explain? Explain! She broke into a laugh of bitter self-irony. What was there to explain? Had she not seen his falsehood with her own eyes? Was there a shadow of reason to doubt that she had been mistaken in what she had seen, or in the inference her own reason had compelled her to draw?

Was this the strength of mind her father had so praised in her? This weak clinging to a vague impracticable hope, this willingness to be beguiled into believing that her own vision, her own reason had played her false and not the man she loved?

She arraigned herself sternly for this pitiable weakness. She called will and pride to her aid. She was appalled to find how little they could do to stem the current of anguish and hopelessness that threatened to overflow her life.

“I loved him so! I leaned so on his grand strength; what can I do without him!” was the cry of her heart.

And this was the woman who had said so calmly, and so fully believed, that when the root of respect died the flower of love died with it.



A servant came in with a card.

“I told you I could see no one,” she said, rebukingly.

“I did tell him them same words, but he said you would see him. It’s Mr. Hall. He’s just come from your father’s study. He wrote something on the card.”

She glanced at the bit of pasteboard in her hand:

“I have news for you,” was penciled upon it. A faint wave of color came into her marble cheeks. The news must refer to Heathcliff.

“I will see him; go and tell him so,” she said to the servant.

She took no time to make any change in her toilet—only to bind her white wrapper with a black cord at the waist—before she went down to the drawing-room where Hazard waited.

She stopped at the door and looked at him a moment unseen. She was studying a miniature held open in his hand. She recognized the case. The housekeeper had brought it to her father that very morning. It was the picture of Laura Montcalm which the general had flung from the window. The housekeeper, who had picked it up and forgotten where she had put it, had at last found it. General Montcalm had given it to Hazard as he was leaving the library, saying:

“There’s that Jezebel’s picture if it will be of any use to you. Don’t open it before me. I should be tempted to crush the she-devil’s face into bits with one blow of my fist.”

It looked like anything but the face of a “she-devil” or a murderess, Hazard thought, as he bent over the picture admiring the sensitive, delicately chiseled features, the earnest brow, the proud, sweet mouth.

“Those eyes seem to rebuke one for thinking of wickedness in connection with their owner,” he said to himself. “But of course she was guilty. Looks count for nothing as indication of character. Women particularly can smile and murder while they smile,” added the youthful cynic.



Honor had approached within a few feet of him before he was aware of her presence. He looked up, colored and rose, bowing in some confusion. Never had she seemed so stately, so unapproachable.

“You wished to see me for some special reasons?” she asked. She had taken no notice of his proffered hand.

“I had something to tell you I thought would interest you. The Red House was visited with a search-warrant last night.”

“Well?”

“The visit resulted in nothing. The search was soon ended. It was discovered that Laura Montcalm was not concealed in the house—never had been.”

A faint glow stained Honor’s snowy throat and cheek, but she made no comment. She looked at Hazard, waiting for him to continue speaking; but he was watching her. He chafed at her immobility. He said to himself he would force her to show the interest she must surely feel. He remained silent, and, turning to the table, played with some lilies in a red Venetian vase. At last she said:

“There was then no woman in the Red House but Miss Faust?”

He raised his eyes, and fixed them on her face.

“Yes, there was another. The woman we saw night before last—the graceful blonde woman who received Heathcliff in the little boudoir. She was there last night, wearing the same blue dress, waiting the same visitor.”

He could not detect any agitation in the beautiful white face, not a quiver of the facial muscles.

“Who was this woman?” she asked, after another pause.

“She is a Miss Gonzalis, an actress formerly; now she is Heathcliff’s—”

She started slightly; she flashed a look at him; a warning of latent lightnings lay in her eyes. Would he dare tell her what this woman was to the man she had so lately honored? Yet her second glance was expectant. She felt



she must hear it. She had a morbid longing to have her heart pierced by the worst she could know of his falsehood and dishonor.

Hazard finished his sentence.

“She is now Mr. Heathcliff’s intended wife.”

“Wife!”

She could not help repeating it. It had gone through her so sharply. She had not expected to hear that word.

“How do you know this?” she asked, presently.

“From his own assertion. He made it to me in the presence of three men who were with me. We had him cornered. He was forced to show his colors, hypocritical scoundrel that he has been all this while.”

Honor’s face flushed hotly. She turned upon Hazard.

“Upon what grounds do you apply such epithets to Mr. Heathcliff?” she said.

He looked at her amazed.

“Can *you* ask? Was he not engaged to you—soon to be married to you?”

“That engagement has been broken off.”

“When? To-day, perhaps. Not last night, when he made that announcement. You had not seen him nor communicated with him. Your father told me so.”

Hazard knew nothing of the short interview between Honor and Heathcliff in Mrs. Blair’s little sitting-room.

“Yes, the engagement had been broken off *then*. Mr. Heathcliff was free, if he chose to speak those words of the lady he had been visiting—the guest of his friend, Miss Faust.”

Her icy tones, her calm, controlled look exasperated Hazard. He wanted to ask how long the engagement had been broken off between the two, but her cold demeanor checked him. He could not understand her. He did not know that in spite of her bleeding heart, her shattered ideal and her own conviction of Heathcliff’s baseness, she could not bear to have him lowered in the eyes of another.



She could not allow Hazard Hall to exult in Heathcliff's downfall from integrity. This was not the effect Hazard had thought to produce by his account of the night visit to the Red House and its result. He had looked for angry scorn and wounded half-revealed anguish, in which he might venture to sympathize. He had looked for some moment of softness and approachability in which he might whisper his readiness to avenge or to console. He had not looked for the phase she was now exhibiting.

"Then, you do not hold that Heathcliff has acted treacherously toward you?" he burst out at last.

"I have no opinion to give in the matter," she answered in the same even, cold tones. "I prefer not to discuss it with you now, nor ever."

"But if your father knew of the woman whom—"

"He will not know," she interrupted; "unless *you* act treacherously, and break your word."

She had approached the piano. She seated herself before it now, and without waiting for his reply, she dashed into the first stormy bars of a bravura.

When she stopped playing he took his leave, puzzled and dissatisfied at the result of the interview. Did she still love Heathcliff? Did she still believe in his honor? Had she possibly released him from his engagement days before? Was it possible for him to win her? It had never seemed so hopeless as to-night. Could she love any one—snow statue that she appeared? He stopped a moment in the street to listen to her. She was playing and singing some brilliant opera air. Suddenly she stopped.

He could not tell why. He could not see the proud head suddenly drop on the out-thrown arms, and hear the cry, "Oh, I did love him! I can not hate him. What shall I do?" burst from her proud, half-broken heart.



## CHAPTER XXXV.

CARLEON'S old chums were completely at sea with regard to him. He no longer came among them. He treated their advances with cool indifference; he took no part in his old diversions. Yet he had not gone over to the moral side. He made no effort to gain the good will of that class. On the contrary, he brusquely repelled the members of various religious and moral societies, who approached in the hope to win over a formidable opponent, a man of strong character and large means. He showed no disposition to enter society or politics. So he continued to be a puzzle. His parasites were alarmed. They had always endured his sarcasms for the sake of his bounty, but now they could rarely gain access to him, to bore or flatter him into bestowing favors. When they did gain an audience, the grim irony with which he treated their flatteries and the contempt with which he granted their requests, galled even their toady souls.

He sat this morning in his little gem of a library at the Wallport Hotel. He wore a dressing-gown of soft Chinese silk—curious crimson figures on a dark cream ground; but his disordered hair, his haggard cheeks and the lines on the brow beneath the tasseled smoking-cap, betrayed how little thought he gave to his appearance.

He had had several callers this morning. Two of General Montcalm's chief backers, with Hazard Hall in tow, had approached him on the subject of money to run the campaign in the interest of the newly brought-out candidate. He signed a check for a tolerably liberal amount and tossed it to them, astounding them by saying:

“This—because I agreed to help in the event of Montcalm's running. But, understand me, if your policy



promises protection to gamblers and liquor sellers, don't count me in for another cent."

"Whew!" uttered one of the men. "Do you go back on yourself that way? The gambling and liquor business have helped to make your fortune. What do you mean by shutting down on them now?"

"I want to give the devil a little rest; that's all. I'm in earnest though, as you'll find out. Good-morning, gentlemen," dismissing them with a wave of his hand.

His next visitor was a woman. She came thickly veiled and muffled. When the door closed behind her, she threw up her veil, revealing a pretty but careworn face. She unfastened the loose wrap and it dropped to the floor, showing a slim, stylish figure, cheaply but coquettishly dressed. She was Annie Greer, the prettiest shop-girl in Wallport. Six months ago her laughing eyes and elastic step had attracted Carleon. He had showed a languid interest in her, which she had discouraged, knowing well what attention from Carleon meant. Things seemed to have gone wrong with her since then; for her cheek had lost its lovely oval, and the tint upon it was artificial.

But under the rouge the color came now, as she said with a nervous laugh:

"Mr. Carleon, I had a struggle with myself before I could come to you. My little sister fell sick this summer; I stopped to wait on her and lost my place. I am in debt and worried to death. I know you will help me. You were kind to me once, and I—I didn't take it as gratefully as I ought."

"You repulsed me; you gave me to understand that you thought I meant no good," Carleon said.

"I—yes, I did. But I was proud. I was doing pretty well: trouble hadn't come to me. I am sorry I treated you so."

"You think, then, that if I should help you now, it would be for better motives?" he asked, eying her keenly.



Her lids dropped.

“I don’t—don’t know,” she stammered. Then she laughed recklessly. “I’m not so particular now,” she said, her cheeks crimsoning. “When a girl has knocked about weeks and weeks, begging work, and has slaved and starved and seen the creature she loves dying under her eyes for want of decent food and medicine, it kills all pride in her, sure. She doesn’t care what comes if she can dodge the wolf of want—and so—”

“And so she walks into the lion’s jaws,” he said grimly.

The girl looked at him in amazement.

“She decks herself in her poor faded ribbons and flowers, and comes to sacrifice herself, silly lamb,” he said in a gentler tone.

Tears rushed to the girl’s eyes.

“How much do you owe?” he asked.

“Twenty dollars.”

“What relations have you?”

“Only my little sister and an old grandmother who lives in the country on a small farm.”

“What are you doing now?”

“Nothing; but I have the promise of a place as waitress in a saloon if I could dress like—”

“Let it alone. Take that little sister of yours into the country to the old grandmother’s farm. Stay there and go to raising silk, or honey, or hops, or something; or marry some honest young farmer. Don’t come back here. I will help you on these conditions; promise me.”

“Oh, I will do as you say, and glad enough, sir. I wish I never had come away.”

“There!” He laid two bills of a hundred dollars each in her trembling palm. “This will pay your debt and give you a little start in your country business. Now go; go at once. Don’t try to blind yourself.”

He pushed her through the door to avoid hearing the eager thanks uttered in the midst of her crying.



“God bless you, sir,” he heard her sob, as he closed the door. He flung himself into a seat.

“What a world!” he sneered. “How sick I am of it all—the devourers and the devoured.”

His face grew softer.

“God bless you,” he repeated. “That was the same prayer little Kildee uttered in my behalf. Vain prayer, my sweet one! Ah, how sweet the lips that murmured it!

“I told you not to come with another card or message to me to-day. I don’t want to see any one,” Carleon said to his servant, Wilkes, who had just opened the door and stood as though about to announce a visitor.

“I told that man so, but he wouldn’t mind it; said he was bound to see you.”

“Go and tell him so again.”

Wilkes went away, but was back in another minute.

“Man says he must see you, sir; says he’s got a message for you from somebody that thinks a mighty heap of you.”

“Thinks a mighty heap of me!” Carleon repeated derisively. “I know people who think a mighty heap of my pocket-book; but of *me*! Faugh! The fellow is a lunatic. Send him away. No, hold on. What sort of a man is he?”

“Jes common-lookin’, sir. Clothes last year’s fashion; hair cut out of the style. Got a mighty independent look out of his eye though.”

“Bring him here.”

A possibility had occurred to Carleon. Might not the message be from Kildee? He had missed her from the fruit-shop, and haunting around Factory Row, he had failed to find her there. Perhaps she was ill; perhaps she had sent some word to him by one of the working-men. It was hardly probable she would send to him; and yet she had seemed less shy of him at their late meetings. She had seemed touched by the love he could not help showing in every look and tone.



He was roused from his musing by the sound of a resonant voice he remembered well, exclaiming:

“How do you find yourself to-day, brother?”

Sam Brown stood in the door-way. Carleon's face darkened.

“I told you not to come to see me,” he said.

“But I told you I would come, you remember, and here I am,” said the other.

“What is your business; let me know it at once. You had a message for me, you said.”

“I have a message from your best friend.”

“Go on. Who is the friend?”

“The Lord.”

Carleon turned on him with angry eyes.

“Your impudence is supreme,” he said. “I am in no mood to tolerate you this morning.”

“You are in the mood to need my message. It is one of love and peace. You are unhappy. You are devouring your very heart with self-disgust. You hate your present self, your old life. Your face is ready to turn the right way, but you are deep-sunk in the Slough of Despond, and you willfully shut your eyes to the hand that is held out to you.”

“Will you take yourself and your threadbare cant out of this room, or shall I have to put you out?”

“I'll go as soon as I have delivered my message, not before.”

“We'll see,” Carleon said, advancing a step toward his unwelcome visitor, and fixing on him a threatening eye.

“Yes, we'll see,” returned Sam Brown, firmly planting himself against the closed door. “You've either got to listen to me, or to lick me—one or the other. I've got no weapon, never carried one of the things; but I've got this pair of hard-hitters the good Lord give me, and if you want to try your white fists against 'em instead of sitting down and lettin' me talk to you like a man and a brother,



why come on. Promise me, though, that if I whip you you'll listen to me peaceably."

He rolled back his coat-sleeves from his brawny hands and sinewy wrists and looked at Carleon, quietly determined. Carleon eyed him a minute with a mixture of surprise, anger and amused curiosity. Finally, with a smile softening the corners of his mouth, he said:

"You are a lunatic. I suppose it wouldn't be fair to knock you down. Why do you think yourself called on to deliver me this imperative message?"

"Because I am impressed by God to do it. Because I am made to feel that you are one of His chosen—that He needs you. He has called you. You are miserable because you will not heed His voice."

"You are wofully mistaken."

"I can't be. There has a change come over you. You are disgusted with your old pursuits. You are repentant."

"It is false," cried Carleon. "I am not repentant. I hate such weakness."

"What then is the cause of the change that has come over you? If it is not aroused conscience, what then is it?"

"I'll tell you what it is," said Carleon fiercely. "To get rid of you, and put such wild notions out of your head, I'll tell you. It is love; not conscience, repentance, nor any such evangelically promising influence, but just love for a woman, a mere child who shrinks from me because I am not of your canting kind. I despise myself for this weakness, but all the same I am miserable. I hate myself because a simple, narrow girl doesn't think me worthy to be loved. Now you have it."

Sam Brown stood for a minute looking into Carleon's eyes. Interest, curiosity, sympathy were expressed in his rugged face.

"Be it so," he said. "God may speak through a woman, as he spoke through Balaam's ass."



His solemn earnestness of speech, and the comparison of a woman with an ass, would have struck Carleon ludicrously at any other time. He only said:

“Then you do not like women?”

“On the contrary I honor them. But this particular woman is only the Lord’s angel in your case. She has troubled the waters of your life that your soul may go down and be healed. Love has done this; but now its work is finished. Shake it off; there are things more real for you. Rouse up, my brother, come over to our side and find peace and happiness.”

“In psalm-singing and self-glorification; in worship of a God who made sin and made man too weak to resist it, then punishes him for yielding? Excuse me, Parson Brown.”

“Who wants you to sit down to psalm-singing and self-glorification? Who says God made sin? I don’t know who created the devil, but he is here, and is fighting against God, and the fight is a drawn battle so far. God calls out for recruits. God wants standard-bearers and leaders. My brother, it is your destiny to be a captain in the cause. Don’t kick against it. Come on, God needs such men as you—bold, strong spirits, scarred with the devil’s chains that they have broke and so proved their strength. We want such men, for the battle thickens. The devil has grown bolder and more cunning with the years since he made this green ball his battle-ground. He is flanking us on every side; he is trying to carry our fortifications with stratagems; he is seeking to silence our batteries by creeping up behind. We need you, and I’ll have you, with God’s help, in spite of the devil. Come over. Find happiness in constant struggle as I do, constant fight against the powers of darkness. Oh, I too have been wounded. I understand your nature. I’ve got one like it. I’m not refined and educated like you, but I was made in a mold something like you, and I understand your temptations.



I've gone through the same sort of trials. I've worn the devil's chains. They are silk at first, but iron in the end. And I'm afraid of my old master yet. I know the sound of his voice, and I tremble lest I answer it. My safety is to keep in the thick of the fight. Come, brother, and help me. Throw off every weight that holds you back. Give your money to the Church or to some benevolent purpose; tear passion out of your heart with the strong hand of will. Come to the cause empty-handed, while though scarred with the wounds that tell of conquest over self. The fight thickens, I tell you. All the powers of darkness are gathered for a mighty charge upon the Prince of Light. I hear the nearing thunders of a stormier battle, but there are high hearts that beat the drum of defiance. Brother, I leave my message with you. Think of it. Let it sound in your ears in the solemn night-time. Earthly riches are dross; earthly passion burns itself out like a flame. Beauty goes like a shadow, fame is a star that soon sets, but the soul, the soul lives on. The conflict between good and evil goes on, and he who wields a sword in the cause of God adds to the stature of his eternal soul and to the souls of men—his brothers. Let the shadows go by, my friend, turn your back on the past, come into the battle-field where eternal issues are contending. Brother, I have delivered my message; I am ready to leave you now."

He ended with a smile of solemn sweetness. Carleon was silent. The man had stood before him like a prophet of old. His rugged face became transfigured as he spoke, his voice was like some deeply vibrant harp. His eye, intense, deep-glowing, held Carleon with its gaze. It was impossible not to fall under the influence of this man in the moments when the commonplace dropped from him as a garment burned away by the white heat of his enthusiasm.

The sneer died on Carleon's lips. "What fanatical nonsense!" he essayed to utter, but the words did not come.



He was silent, as Sam Brown laid his rough hand on his arm, and sinking his voice to a whisper, said:

“Good-bye, my brother; God be with you, and win you over to Himself.”

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

It was nearly time for the curtain to rise when Hazard entered the theater. The new building was filled from pit to gallery. Seats for the members of the press had, however, been reserved, and the representative of “The Rattler” made his way to a place in front of the stage. The orchestra was playing an overture, and among the musicians was Max Rubin. His fair curls, and the peculiar pose of his head and play of his arm, as he handled the bow of his violoncello made him known to Hazard, even before he saw the face of this friend he really liked so well.

Hazard had already seen Kildee. A whisper from his neighbor drew the attention of the girl as she sat in the mayor’s handsome box, whose rose-silk flutings and lace draperies made a fitting frame for her rich, delicate face. To this face Hazard turned his opera-glass, the instant after he had recognized Max among the orchestra performers. He saw that she looked pale and disturbed; he saw that her eyes were bent in a wistful, intent way on the young musician, and in his impetuous way he jumped at a conclusion.

“She does not love Heathcliff,” he said to himself. “She loves Max, who found her a starving waif and took care of her. The poor fellow worships her, and he ought to have her. I’ll help him to get her, too. Never mind if it does exasperate my lord-mayor. He will find that money can’t buy him everything.”

Again he searched the girl’s face through the magnifying lens. Yes, she scarcely looked pale, and her dark eyes



seemed to rest sadly and yearningly on Max, who had not yet seen her. The conclusion Hazard had drawn appeared quite reasonable to himself. He could not know of the hard trial Kildee had had that afternoon in Mme. Jean's ice-cream parlor—of the struggle with herself and the bitterness of the renunciation she had determined on. He could not know that the words: "She threw herself on his sympathy; he will marry her through pity; the marriage is absurd; it will blight his social and political prospects," rang in her ears above the music of all these sweet-toned instruments. He could not guess what a weary, home-sick longing came over her as she saw Max sitting there, and remembered her old life of wandering and makeshift and merriment; of cares sweetened with love, and fun and happy comradeship. When she had first caught sight of his blonde head, her heart gave a great throb and she half sprang from her seat.

"It is Max! Oh, it is Max!" she said, in an eager whisper. Then she remembered the many eyes that were upon her; she turned and met Heathcliff's kind but slightly restraining look, and she sunk back on her seat with hot cheeks.

"You shall go to them when the play is over," the mayor said, reassuringly. "It is likely your friend Lottie is here too; I see the name Carlotta on the programme."

In the second scene Lottie made her appearance. She was dressed as a French peasant, and looked roguish and pretty. Kildee's heart beat fast, her eyes filled with tears. It was well for her composure that Lottie did not see, or, at least, did not recognize her. When the curtain fell on the first act, Hazard, with a reporter's privilege, went behind the scenes. He came plump upon M. Ducciole, otherwise Duck, who had a part in the next scene as an antiquated beau, and was gotten up in powdered wig and shoe-buckles. The Professor of Shakespeare received him with open arms, and took him at once to see Lottie. That little



lady was in her dressing-room, touching up her eyebrows preparatory to putting on a fresh bodice, but she responded to her father's call, snatched a lace shawl and wrapped herself in it and opened the door.

"Dear me, it is Hazard," she cried, her blushes eclipsing her rouge. "I saw you in the crowd, sir, and flung you a sly kiss which I don't think you noticed, you were staring so at somebody in one of the boxes—a woman, of course. I'm glad to see you; you look well; quite the political dandy. But your face has some lines on it which were not there last June when you said good-bye to us that night at the wretched little hall in that little town—Rock Springs—was its name? Ah, none of our folks will soon forget that town, or that night. You left us before the play was over; do you know that Kildee's mother was there and recognized her, and took her away from us? It broke us all up in our business, and nearly broke our hearts too to give up the darling child. She was just like our own, you know. Poor Max, he took it terribly. He followed her right away, but he missed finding her. And it's dreadfully strange, distressed as she was at parting with us, she has never written one line—never. I wrote and wrote to Wallport, where her mother said they would be, but not a word in reply."

"Perhaps she was not permitted to write or to receive your letters."

"It must be so. I know what a dear, loving little creature she was. I suppose that woman, who had such a convenient way of forgetting she had a child until she took a fancy to remember it—I suppose she objected to Kildee's holding any communication with the friends that had taken care of her. Max has been tramping the country over trying to find her, until he spent his last dollar, poor, dear goose!" Lottie said, shaking her head.

"Well, he need not look any further," said Hazard. "He has seen her, or he will see her. Why, Max, old fel-



low, how are you? What's the matter with you?" he broke off.

Max's face had appeared at the door, a white, dazed look upon it.

"Hazard," he said, speaking huskily. "Who is that in the box with Mayor Heathcliff? They told me the man was Mayor Heathcliff. The girl, they said, was his—bride, or that she was to be married to him soon. But she looked—I had only a glimpse at her face; she drew back in the shadow of the curtain—but she looked—like Kildee."

"She is Kildee, Max."

"Where has she been all this time? Where is her mother?"

"I don't know where in the mischief she has been; and I have never seen her mother. I had not seen *her* until, a week ago, I met her in a strange kind of way. I had no conversation with her then, and have not had since. She is Heathcliff's protégée, and I have nothing to do with him."

"How came she under his care?"

"I can't tell you; it's all a puzzle to me."

"And is she to—marry him?"

"So they say; so he says; somehow I don't think it's her wish. She looks unhappy to-night, and she watches you and Lottie in a wistful way."

"Little darling!" cried Lottie. "I feel sure she cares for us. I want to find out all this mystery. I must see her this very night. Hazard, can't you get that high-mighty personage to bring her to us behind the scenes when the play is over?"

"I'll bring her myself," said Hazard. "I'll bring her in spite of him."

"Goodness, there's the bell for the curtain to rise, and I go on so soon and not a bit ready," cried Lottie, darting away. "Now go this minute, both of you. Be sure you bring Kildee, Hazard."



Five minutes afterward Lottie tripped on the stage and launched into an animated dialogue with the villain of the play, whose plots against the lovely *prima* it was her part to detect while pretending to be his ally. In the midst of her arch posing, she threw a glance at the mayor's box, caught Kildee's eye, and flung her two quick kisses. Kildee smiled radiantly, but the next instant the shadow settled in her eyes. She looked with sad yearning at Lottie's happy face. She could see no change there, while *she*—ah! the old merry life seemed *so far*. She was such a happy child then; *now* she was a woman. Love and sorrow had ripened her so soon—too soon.

She became conscious that Heathcliff was looking down at her with questioning sympathy. He did not understand what she was feeling, but he saw that the sight of her old friends had affected her profoundly. He bent down and whispered:

“You will speak with them to-night, and to-morrow you shall go to see them. They are to stay a day, and play again before they leave.”

The curtain fell on the last act, and in a second Hazard Hall was at the door of the mayor's box. He glanced at Heathcliff and slightly nodded as he passed in. He approached Kildee, bowed and handed her the bouquet she had nearly forgotten.

“I am commissioned by our mutual friends,” he said, “to bring you to them behind the scenes.”

He extended his hand to take hers, but Heathcliff interposed.

“I will spare you the trouble of accompanying Miss Gonzalis,” he said, in his quiet, cold way.

He took Kildee's hand and laid it on his arm. He passed Hazard without noticing him further, and led Kildee through the door that opened into the apartments and passages known as “behind the scenes.”

Lottie was on the watch for her. She came flying to her



in the short peasant dress. Heathcliff drew back and stood leaning against the wall outside of hearing of what they might say. Lottie caught Kildee in her arms, laughing and crying at once. Then she held the girl off from her and cried:

“Ah, how you have changed! You have grown a little lady—a little queen. But you always had that stately way. *La Petite Princesse* you know Max used to call you.”

“Where is Max?”

“Why, he was here just now—Max! where has he vanished?”

Max was standing out of sight behind the scenery, where he had stopped when he saw Kildee. He wanted to give himself a little time that he might meet her calmly.

Lotta went on: “Max, poor fellow, has been searching for you everywhere, half crazy because he couldn’t find a bit of clew to your whereabouts. He wrote and wrote, but not a line from you.”

“I wrote many letters. They were all destroyed and yours never reached me. I could not mail or get my letters myself. I was on an island—kept there against my will.”

“And your mother—”

“She was not my mother. She deceived me. Oh, I have suffered a great deal. I thought I had no friend; none; but the good God befriended me. He sent me a kind protector.”

“You mean that grand-looking gentleman who came with you?”

“Yes; Mr. Heathcliff. He is mayor of the city and will probably be governor of the state.”

“And he will marry you, Kildee? It is like a fairy tale.”

Kildee’s face suddenly paled.

“Who told you so?” she asked tremulously. “There is no assurance of such a thing. I am not fit to be the wife of Mr. Heathcliff.”



“You are fit to be the wife of a king,” cried Lottie.  
 “Is she not, Max?”

Max had drawn near them, but he stood hesitating, looking at Kildee. He was pale and his face bore witness of an inward tumult. She turned and saw him, a flash of pleasure went over her features and she came to him holding out her hands.

“Oh, Max! how glad I am to see you!” He did not reply. He did not embrace her, to Lottie’s indignant surprise. He held her hands and looked at her. His look was so earnest and sad that Kildee’s eyes filled. She said:

“Do you find me changed, Max?”

“Yes, you are changed, much changed for the short while,” he answered.

“But she’s all the sweeter for it; why don’t you tell her so, stupid,” cried Lottie, tapping him sharply with her fan.

He was still looking at Kildee.

“You have suffered,” he said; “I heard you tell Lottie so. But—you are happy now. You are quite happy?” he repeated, changing the assertion into an inquiry.

His intense look made her eyes falter.

“I have every reason to be content,” she said after awhile. “I have friends who surround me with all kindness.”

“Mr. Heathcliff is—”

“He is a good, true man,” said Kildee earnestly. “You must know him. He will perhaps come with me to-morrow to see you.”

“Do not bring him,” Max burst forth. “Let us have you with us that little while just as you used to be.”

There was a depth of emotion in his voice that surprised Kildee. She had always known him as light-hearted. He must have had some trouble she thought, and she looked at him anxiously. What she saw in his eyes, made her breath come quickly. She turned away.

“They are beginning to put out the lights,” she said.



“Yes,” answered Lottie. “We will say good-night to you now, and to-morrow morning you will come to us, and we will have such a chat as will remind you of the dear old times. Mamma is at the hotel; she had her ancient enemy, neuralgia, this evening, and papa hurried back to her like a dutiful *sposo*, as soon as he had been run through by Count Algerian’s sword. Come early, dear; you know we have a matinee at two.”

Heathcliff had stood out of hearing of what had been said, but he had been keenly, though quietly observant. He had seen Max’s agitation, and had interpreted it.

“He loves her,” he said to himself—“not in the brother-like fashion she told me of. She was not aware of this deeper feeling; but it is plain to me. Does she not respond to it?—unconsciously, perhaps. He is very handsome, with his frank blue eyes and sunny hair. Does she love him? She was very much agitated to-night. Is it possible that in trying to do her good, I have come between this child and her happiness?”

The thought troubled him. The idea that Kildee loved another somehow made him feel more desolate. It was as though there was no love for him anywhere. He had been fancying that he could make some sunshine for himself out of the affection this sweet, rich young spirit could give him when she was his wife, and now—! But his trouble was mostly for her.

“If she really cares for him, I will not interpose my selfish wish between them,” he said; and he determined to lead Kildee to confide in him.

As they drove homeward through the balmy night, cooled with dews and lighted with stars, he said:

“Now you may talk to me on that important matter you were going to tell me about this afternoon. What is it, my bird?”

At his words—at the question which brought up all she had gone through this afternoon and the still bitterer trial



of renunciation which she had yet to go through, she trembled like a caught bird. She tried to answer, but stammered something incoherent; and was silent.

“Speak freely, my child,” he said reassuringly. “Remember it is your interest I have most at heart.”

“But you must not have my interests most at heart, Mr. Heathcliff,” she found voice to say. “You must not let your care of them injure your own interests.”

“What do you mean, little one?”

“You have asked me to marry you soon, Mr. Heathcliff?”

“Yes, Kildee. Day after to-morrow—Sunday—in the old church under the pines where I have been a worshiper so long—whose shadow falls over my mother’s grave. Do you shrink from it, Kildee? Are you perfectly content to become my wife?”

“No, Mr. Heathcliff.”

“I feared as much,” he said, gently. “Well, tell me all, dear child. Do not think I shall reproach you. It was not much to expect that you should love me—when there—”

“Oh, it is not that, dear friend. But I am not worthy to be your wife. You, in your kindness and pity are willing to take me as I am, but I am not willing to spoil your good, useful life. You overlook my defects, but others see them and know that I am no fit mate for you.”

“Is that all, Kildee?”

“Oh! is it not enough—enough? Do you think I can consent to let you suffer for your own kindly meant act? This marriage will injure you socially and politically.”

“You said that in a parrot-like way, little bird. You have been hearing some foolish gossip. Confess now.”

She made no answer.

“And it has wounded you to the heart. Miserable meddlers! Don’t care for them, little one. They chatter as the blackbirds do for very emptiness of head. Listen to



me, Kildee. This marriage is a matter between ourselves. There is but one question in it for me. I will put it to you as directly as possible; and you must look into your heart and answer it truly. Will you?"

"Yes," she was constrained to answer.

"Well then," and his hand closed firmly on hers, "is there any one you love better than you love me; any one you had rather marry if the other conditions were the same?"

"There is not," she was constrained to answer, and the next breath she regretted having so answered, for it made useless all further argument from her against the marriage. He carried her hand to his lips, and then pressing it against his cheek said:

"Then trouble yourself no more about the matter, my child."

"But you—?" she ventured to say wistfully. She would have given much to be able to ask:

"Do *you* not love another better, oh, far better than poor little me? Are you not going to marry me with your heart filled with her image?—thus sealing your unhappiness and mine?"

But timidity withheld her. She stood in awe of him; he was so much older and wiser than she.

"I have told you that it would make me happier to have you in my home," he answered, and then the carriage stopped.

He saw her safely within the doors of the Red House, and left her with that light, tender, passionless kiss on her brow.



## CHAPTER XXXVII.

So Kildee went alone to see her friends. Mrs. Duck gathered her to her broad, motherly bosom; the professor blessed her and rejoiced over her in his finest stage-father manner, the boys came about her—handsome, darkly mustached fellows—Lottie fluttered around her, putting touches to her hair and ribbons, and giving her little delighted hugs.

Presently she found herself seated in a basket-chair in the middle of the characteristically disordered room—the center of a little circle of love and petting and affectionate curiosity, answering a dozen questions, some of which were very trying to her. For Max stood a little aloof, pretending to mend the strings of Lottie's guitar that had to be used in the afternoon performance—and his sad blue eyes were fixed often on her face—the eyes in which she had last night read his secret. She had never suspected it before; but then she had not loved. Love teaches us wisdom.

She felt a pang that was like remorse when she saw the anxious look on that face she had always seen beaming with happy good nature. He joined but little in the conversation. He was a poor hand to dissemble, and his look when Kildee's marriage was spoken of would have betrayed him to any one.

“When is it to be, pet? It seems no secret that you are to make this grand marriage; you will not mind telling us when it will take place,” Mrs. Duck had asked.

Kildee hesitated, and her pale face and troubled voice when she spoke were unlike those of a prospective bride.

“To-morrow”—she answered—“So it has been appointed; but—”

“But what, dear child?”



“ Oh! I don’t feel that it will ever happen. It ought not to—no, it ought never to be.”

Mrs. Duck looked at her in surprise, but Lottie apparently solved the doubt.

“ She doesn’t think she is good enough to be a governor’s wife—little timid goose. Now if it was me, there might be some reason in being oppressed by the weight of

“ ‘ An honor unto which I was not born;’

but Kildee was always a little princess in disguise,

“ ‘ Nothing she said or did

But smacked of something greater—’

than a strolling little play actress. She can wear the purple (figuratively; purple wouldn’t be becoming to her complexion as a matter of fact) right royally. Goodness, just think of it! a governor’s bride. Why, it would turn my head. Yet, I don’t know if I wouldn’t be happier as I am with my art and my freedom. I’m a born vagabond, you see—a wolf of the wilds of Bohemia. I couldn’t wear a tame dog collar though it was set with diamonds.”

As she spoke, and as they all prattled around her, and she heard once more the merry laughter and the affectionate teasing and the professional slang, Kildee felt a half longing to be back once more with these old comrades in the vagabond, care-free life she must put far behind her to-morrow, when she entered that new stately existence. Max saw that wistful look in her eyes and noted the hesitating way she had spoken of her marriage, and he drew from them a wild hope.

“ What if she does not care for Mayor Heathcliff,” he said to himself: “ if she only promised to marry him because he was kind to her, and she seemed to have no other friend. What if she would be willing to draw back now—even at this late hour. She is truth itself; if she has come to understand her own heart to-day she will not take a vow



on her lips she feels is not true. I must see her alone. I must find out her real feelings. If she does not shrink from this marriage, as she seems to me to do, it should not take place."

He roused himself from his reverie. Kildee was going. He came close to her and said low:

"May I see you to-night—an hour before the performance?"

His eyes were more pleading even than his tones. Kildee could not resist them. She felt that the interview he asked would be painful to both, and yet she said:

"I will see you."

No one observed the little by-play but Mrs. Duck. She understood it. With the sympathetic instinct of her motherly heart, she had penetrated Max's secret. Lottie was preoccupied. Hazard had called and she was happy. He stayed and accompanied her to the theater for the matinee play.

From a convenient loop-hole, they surveyed the audience.

"Who is the beautiful girl in white lace and pale blue?" asked Lottie. "I saw her last night."

"She is the daughter of General Montcalm," answered Hazard; "the most beautiful woman I ever saw, and the proudest. And yet, like most women, she lets love subdue her pride and conquer her pitifully," he added.

There was so much bitterness in his tones that Lottie was moved with surprise and jealousy. She turned and looked at him questioningly. His dark face was moody. He had seen Honor Montcalm's eyes turn again and again to the mayor's box, which, however, remained empty. He had watched her last night, and, by more than one subtle token, he had known how keenly she suffered seeing Heathcliff seated beside the girl who, as was now well known, would shortly be his wife.

The matinee was over, the lovely October afternoon wore toward evening. A splendid sunset kindled its fires



and faded. Max Rubin, standing on the sea-shore, watched the crimson pale into cold ashen purple, while he waited impatiently for the hour of his visit to come. It came. He hurried to the Red House, but Kildee had received a summons which gave a new turn to her life. The interview took place, but under circumstances far different from what either had imagined.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SEVEN o'clock. Kildee heard the vibrating strokes of the city clock as she walked back and forth in the darkly shaded, massive-pillared veranda of the Red House.

The evening had set in stormily. The sun at setting dropped from behind a lid of heavy clouds, lit the world for a moment with a lurid, blood-red blaze and disappeared. The cloud-lid shut darkly down, now and then a tongue of red fire leaped from its blackness. A wind sprung up and increased in violence, but no rain fell.

Kildee was restless. Did she feel in her prophetic consciousness that some crisis of her fate was at hand? Tomorrow was her marriage-day. The wedding-dress had been sent home only an hour ago.

"Go to your room and see what you will find there," Miss Faust had said to her, gliding up suddenly behind her, as she sat at a window lost in a reverie which was not all sweet. She went. The window-blinds were closed, shutting out the gloomy twilight. Two wax lights lit the room mellowly; and on the pale blue silk coverlid of the bed lay the bridal dress, white and delicate and dream-like as the spray mist of a mountain water-fall.

She stood and looked at it in silence. She tried to picture herself enveloped in all that fleecy lace and satin standing beside Ira Heathcliff in the dim grand old church where his mother had worshiped and where her dead



body had lain, standing beside him as his bride, hearing him swear in the presence of the white-robed priest and listening assembly to love and cherish her while life should last. She could not make the picture seem real. Some inner voice seemed whispering low: "It will never be. Fate will interfere, as once before."

She shut the white dream out of her sight behind the doors of her *armoire*, and quitted the wax-lighted room for the dark, cool veranda. The gloom of the tree shadows and ivy-vines near, of the clouds and gathering tempest afar were far more congenial to her mood. As the clock struck seven she suddenly remembered the impending interview with Max—remembered it with a thrill of pain. She felt sure he had wrongly interpreted her hesitation and lack of happy responsiveness whenever her approaching marriage with Heathcliff had been spoken of. He had drawn the inference that the marriage was repugnant to her; that only her unfriended condition and her gratitude for Heathcliff's kindness had brought about the engagement. He had founded hopes for himself on this belief. He was coming to-night to urge them—Max, to whom she owed so much—her guardian, her brother, her "little papa," as she had called him when a child. It would be hard to give him pain; she loved him so dearly. Blue-eyed, merry, truthful, tender Max. She might have cared for him as he wished had she remained with the troupe, had there never occurred that eventful break in her life. But now—she wished he had not come again. She wished she had not seen that he loved her. The revelation had come to her suddenly and with a shock of pain. She must deceive him as soon and as tenderly as she could. And then she thought, "I might not have been so ready to do this last night. When I saw Max and Lottie while yet these cruel words I heard at Madame Jean's were piercing my heart, I was tempted to go to them and ask them to take me back under their care, to give me some of the old work



to do; but after what happened in the ride home I could not do it. I had not courage to put aside this new sweet happiness, though I fear, oh! I fear it is based on a delusion. But he was so kind and tender last night, and he is so true. Surely he would not let me deceive myself with the thought that he cares for me when he does not. And if he loved me, I would not mind the talk of other people. He would not mind it. He is strong enough to be what he wills in spite of their misjudging gossip. I can not—”

She stopped short in her promenade in the dark veranda. A footstep crunched the gravel of the walk close by. She had not heard the peculiar ring of the gate-bell or Caleb's shuffling tread going to answer. Only Heathcliff had a duplicate key to the gate. Then it was he; she was glad. His voice would dispel the doubts that had again begun to gather. But Max! he had asked to see her alone.

She came to meet her visitor. He recognized the slight shape dimly outlined as it was.

“Kildee,” he said, “I am glad to find you at once. You and I are called to see a dying woman to-night, at Factory Row. She writes that she has something important to communicate—something that concerns you—your early life and parentage. This is the substance of the two or three scrawled lines dictated by her and taken down by Mrs. Betts. The note came half an hour ago, but I was out. Get your hat and wrap and come at once; we may be too late.”

Kildee's hands trembled so she could hardly fasten the dark wrap she threw around her. Her early life, her parents, was she about to hear the mystery of her birth solved at last? She remembered how strangely this woman had looked at her when she (Kildee) first came to nurse her at Factory Row; how she had questioned her about her childhood, and had seemed singularly interested and agitated when she had learned the peculiar circumstances of Kildee's early life.



“I am ready,” she said, coming out on the veranda, after hardly a minute’s absence. Heathcliff took her hand and they walked rapidly to the gate, which he opened and then locked behind them. His carriage waited outside; as they were entering it, a cab was driven to the gate, and Max leaped out. The light of the carriage lamps shone on Kildée’s face and he uttered an exclamation of surprise and reproach. She gave him her hand from the carriage window.

“I am called to see a friend who is very ill—dying,” she said. She had no time to say more; the horses sprung forward and the carriage was borne swiftly away.

Max stood a second biting his lip in disappointment. Then he jumped into the cab.

“Follow the carriage,” he said to the driver. “I wish to see where they are going.”

He determined not to be balked of his purpose to see her to-night. It was his one poor chance to succeed in breaking off a marriage he believed was repugnant to her. With difficulty the driver of the cab kept the carriage in sight. Its twinkling lamps were the only guide to its progress after it had turned into the narrow, badly lighted Mills Street on which the factory and the factory tenement buildings were situated.

Before one of these houses the carriage stopped, and its occupants alighted. The ground-floor of the building was used as a shop where provisions and other merchandise were sold to the mill hands. A long flight of steps opening into the street led to the second story, which was occupied by factory people. Max watched Kildée and Heathcliff ascend the stairs. He noted the place well before he ordered the cab to be driven to the theater. He had an important part in the opening overture. He would play this, but when it was done, he would return to Factory Row. The troupe to which he was attached would leave the city at one o’clock to-night; to-morrow Kildée would



belong to another. He must watch his opportunity to speak to-night.

Another beside Max had seen Kildee and Heathcliff leave the carriage. Carleon was passing the building at the time. He started at recognizing the girl, and stopped in the shadow. He had missed her from Mme. Jean's shop for a week, and had been unable to find her at Factory Row. At last he asked Mme. Jean what had become of her pretty young assistant. The little lady drew down her blonde eyebrows and gave Carleon a sharp look from her china-blue eyes. She knew Carleon's old reputation.

"*Ma foi!*" she said, "what beesiness gentlemeens askeen after prettee gells? La Petite ees good as prettee. She finds freends to take care of her."

"What friends, Madame Jean? Where have they taken her?"

But Mme. Jean only shook her soft gray curls and became hard of hearing. She always pretended to be deaf when it suited her convenience.

"So Heathcliff is the friend who has taken care of her," thought Carleon as he walked on, after watching the girl's slight figure disappear up the dark, winding stairway. Then he suddenly remembered that the rumor had been rife in town all day that the governor prospective was soon to marry a very young girl—a relative or a protégé of Miss Faust, the queer owner of the Red House. He stopped short, and a spasm of pain contracted his brow.

"This must be the girl," he said. He reproached himself for the selfish pang the thought gave him.

"She will be happy. Heathcliff is a splendid fellow. I ought to be glad for her sake," he said. "And I will be glad," he added, setting his teeth and striding on.

He passed a building, in an upper room of which the Working Men's Club were holding a meeting. He could hear some one speaking. He knew the ringing tones as Hazard Hall's. He stopped an instant to listen, and



caught fragments of sentences breathing the seductive spirit of Communism, "Lion's share," "Grasping monopolists," "Equal rights of all men to the comforts of life, and to a chance to be happy," "Hard times do not press equally on the rich and poor; if the rich man stints, it is in things for show, the poor man must stint in the things that are for life."

There was loud applause when the speech was ended. Presently, while Carleon stood leaning against the wall, three men came down the steps. They were talking in low, excited tones.

"Whilst those fools up there are wasting their breath in speechifying we'll be acting," said a curious, falsetto voice, which Carleon recognized as belonging to an eccentric, cranky individual, known as Nick Woods, or Wild Nick, a thin, swarthy man with a black, restless eye, indicating a streak of genius, but a crooked streak that could never be turned to practical account. He had invented a contrivance by which a wheel could be turned by water-power in mid-stream without the use of a dam. He had dogged Heathcliff to get him to buy the invention, but Heathcliff doubting its practicability refused to purchase it. Nick Woods became indignant—furious, and grew so abusive that the mayor thrust him from his presence. From this hour, the man became Heathcliff's bitter enemy. In all the club meetings he had taken active part. He aspired to be a leader, but his extreme views, his personal acridness, and his wild suggestions made even the most disaffected reluctant to accept as leader a spirit so ultra and reckless. This chafed him yet more. His vindictive feelings grew stronger. His wife had been employed in Heathcliff's factory, and her earnings had supported them both. He took her away because of his hatred to the mayor; then, when he missed the good food her wages had bought and wished her to go back her place was filled. He visited this upon Heathcliff's head and denounced the mill-owner



as a heartless oppressor and extortioner. He was ready for any mad act to gratify his revengeful feeling, and he had succeeded in getting a small following—a few ignorant, besotted creatures whom Hazard Hall's communistic eloquence had stirred up to do something, they knew not what, to express their sense of the injustice done them by the rich, and their resolve to stand by their rights.

It was this Nick Woods and two of his followers who came down the steps talking in excited half whispers as Carleon stood against the wall in the dark.

“Everything can be ready by eleven,” added Nick. “The night is just right; glorious! It will be a big sight, and the Grand Mogul will dance—on his left toe—when he sees it.”

They passed on and Carleon reflected on the speech he had heard. There was perhaps some mischief on hand. Perhaps he ought to put the police on the watch. But then Nick Woods was famous for his inconsequent speeches. What he had just said might have no serious meaning. Carleon would have decided differently had he seen an anonymous letter Heathcliff had received to-day, warning him that mischief was brewing and begging him to have a strict night-watch around the factory. Heathcliff had meant to profit by the warning and take the precaution suggested, but the summons of Nell Barnes put everything else out of his mind.

The factory, insured for but little over half its value, was unwatched to-night, and mad Nick Woods and his followers had determined that the hour was ripe for dealing a blow at the rich oppressor.

Heathcliff found Nell Barnes in her room on the third floor of the tenement house. A lamp burned dimly on the mantel-piece. Its light fell on the bony wasted face and sunken eyes of the woman, who sat bolt upright in bed propped by a chair and pillows. She had dropsy of the heart, and could not lie down without a suffocating sensa-



tion. An hour ago, after a fearful paroxysm, her physician had told her she might die any minute. She called him a fool and ordered him to leave her presence, but she had hurriedly dictated two notes and sent them off—one to Heathcliff, the other to Honor Montcalm—and she had told Mrs. Betts where to find her burial clothes, and charged her not to let her false teeth be taken out when she was prepared for the coffin; if she did, she (Nell) would come back and haunt her every night, a toothless ghost.

She turned her preternaturally bright eyes on the mayor when he and Kildee entered the room.

“You took your time to get here,” she said, sharply. “You big folks think Death himself must wait your pleasure; you’ll miss it some day when he knocks at your door. Honor Montcalm, where are you going? Come back.”

A tall figure in a straight, gray wrap had risen from a seat in a corner near the bed; a white face looked out from a cloud of pale zephyr.

“I am going. You are better. You have others to attend to you,” Honor said, in a voice she tried to render calm.

“My ‘better’ is not going to last, I tell you. I’ll have another spell and I’ll go off in it. And I’ve got something to say that you must hear. You owe it to me to close my dead eyes at least. Your father and you are my only kin in this world. You’ve looked down on me, you’ve neglected me, but you’re my kin still; and these arms nursed you when you was a baby. Sit down here, close by me, and stay and see me die. You’ve got to die yourself one day. It mayn’t be long; you’re as pale as death now.”

Honor was indeed as white as the dress she wore. The unexpected sight of Heathcliff; the thought “He believes I came here expecting to see him,” had shaken her self-control. She did not look at him, and this the quick eyes of Nell Barnes took note of.

“What’s the matter between you two?” she said.



“You love each other; all the town knows that; what business have you quarreling?”

Honor rose once more; her cheeks were red enough now, her eyes blazing. Heathcliff interposed before she could speak.

“Don’t exhaust yourself with this irrelevant talk,” he said to Nell Barnes. “You sent for me to hear some important communication. You sent for Miss Montcalm, I suppose, for the same purpose. Neither of us knew that the other would be here. We are ready to listen to your communication, if you are strong enough to make it. But if it does not concern Miss Montcalm, she—”

“It does concern her; it concerns her father. I sent for both. I suppose he was afraid to come—afraid I would abuse him—on my death-bed.”

“I told you he was not in the city,” Honor interposed.

“Well, well, I am hard. May be I’m unjust; it’s easy to be unjust to rich folks. I hope it’ll be forgiven to me; it ought to be. Nothing oughtn’t to be laid up against me, because I’ve suffered enough to blot everything. I sinned in this thing, though, and I want to make amends. I—Kildee, child, you’ll curse me, I reckon, when I— Kildee, quick! Hand me my drops; fan me—fan—”

The girl was already at her side plying the fan she had taken from Mrs. Betts. She sprung to reach the medicine, brought it on the instant; but Nell motioned it away. She was struggling for breath. Her wasted chest heaved with great throes; her face was knotted with agony. Great drops of sweat stood on her forehead. Kildee wiped them away. She bathed the convulsed face in cold water and brandy. Heathcliff supported the relaxed head; and Honor, coming forward in this moment of self-forgetfulness, chafed her hands briskly and steadily.

The fight for life was fearful. “It will be the end,” thought those about her, but her strong vitality carried her



through it. The convulsion passed, but it left her exhausted and breathless. When she recovered a little she turned to Kildee, and in broken whispers directed her to open her trunk, look in a secret pocket and bring the folded paper she would find there. It was brought, and she signed that they should bring her ink and pen. She then unfolded the paper, and grasping the pen, signed her name in tremulous but legible characters. With a motion of the hand and lips she indicated her desire that Heathcliff and Miss Montcalm should affix their names as witnesses to her signature. Heathcliff wrote his name and took the paper to Honor. She had not understood that she was required to write, and she was looking down, wondering what revelation this woman could be about to make, when Heathcliff gently spoke her name. She started and looked up, saw him standing so near her, met the look of his sad, deep eyes, and for a moment lost the composure she had struggled to preserve. The blood rushed to her brow; her hand shook so she could hardly trace her name. Kildee saw it; her glance went rapidly, unobtrusively over each face. "Nell Barnes told the truth," she said to herself. "And shall I stand between them? No, I must not; I will not."

Nell Barnes watched the writing of the witnesses' names with eager eyes. She drew a deep breath of content.

"It's all there," she said, pointing to the paper in Heathcliff's hands. "I wanted to tell it with my tongue. There's more written down there than I wanted should stand. There's some hard things against him—your father, Honor Montcalm—and may be they're too harsh. I hadn't no claim on him but kin—second cousin at that. I hope he'll for—forgive. Kildee." Her voice softened as she turned her head to the girl who sat close to her, fanning her softly. "You must forgive; you mustn't hate me. You're a good girl. You've been good to me and stood my crossness. You didn't know what a wrong I had done you, but—well, I want you to know it first and then say



you forgive, if you can. Read it," she said to Heathcliff; "there's some hard things, but—"

Her voice failed, and she made a quick imperative motion of the hand commanding Heathcliff to read the paper he held.

It began with a short sketch of her relationship to General Montcalm—by the mother's side. Her father was a thriftless, strolling dentist, who died leaving his wife in utter poverty. She applied by letter to General Montcalm, who sent her a "small sum," and wrote that he could do no more just then. Nell's mother died of fever shortly after, and she, a girl of eighteen, was taken into General Montcalm's family, not as an adopted daughter, but as a dependent, which she seemed bitterly to resent. She was required to do small services in return for her board and clothes. She was seldom admitted into the drawing-room, or introduced to the grand guests. She found a lover though, and was devoted to him; but they needed money to marry on. The general refused to furnish it, and told her her lover was worthless. The young man finally left her and gave his attentions to another girl. She was heart-stricken. She laid the disappointment at General Montcalm's door. In her bitterness she would have done anything to injure him. Her strongest desires were first to revenge herself upon the Montcalms for her real or fancied wrongs, and then to get money enough to quit a place that had such miserable associations. One day an evil Fate gave her the opportunity to fulfill both these wishes. She was returning from a walk; had been taking the general's little girl, his favorite, to the station to see him go off on a short business trip. She stopped on a bridge that spanned the river. As she stood there holding the child in her arms gazing at the swift, dark waters below, some one touched her arm. She turned and saw a woman with a black veil half swept aside from her dark, foreign-looking, handsome face.



“Whose child is this?” asked the woman, and Nell answered that it was Mrs. Montcalm’s.

“Was that its father I saw leaving on the train just now?”

“Yes; he was going off with—”

“I knew it. The child is his image. Do you like him?” the woman interrupted, and Nell answered, impetuously:

“No, I hate him. I hate everybody. I only wish I had money to go away where I could never see anybody I had ever known.”

Here the reading of the paper came to a sudden end. A startling interruption came from outside. For some minutes they had heard, without heeding, a hubbub in the street a little distance off, hoarse cries, exclamations, and, further off, the clang of the fire alarm. But fires were of frequent occurrence. They had given it no attention. Now, however, a red glare, which, had they not been pre-occupied, they might, some time before, have seen streaming through the closed shutters, increased in brilliancy; voices and hurrying feet were heard in the street just below.

“It’s Heathcliff’s Mill blazing away like forty!” cried some one, who was evidently running at the top of his speed.

Heathcliff threw the paper on the table, and ran to the window. He threw open the shutters. The blackness of the night was lighted up with lurid radiance. Dark sky, gloomy houses and narrow streets glowed in the blood-red illumination. The factory was not far off. Heathcliff leaned out until he could see the front. Red flames were bursting from its windows. He drew back; his teeth were set, his eyes gleamed sternly.

“It is the mill. Those political guerrillas have done their work well,” he muttered.

The mill had been his pet. He loved every piece of



machinery it contained. He took pride in the order and perfection of all the appurtenances, no less than in the substantial stone and brick building.

He walked to the table and picked up the roll of paper. Honor Montcalm snatched it from his hand. She was in a state of high excitement. She felt as though her father was responsible for the incendiary deed that had been done—as though it affected his honor. The instigators of the discontent against Heathcliff were of his clan. She faced Heathcliff with white cheeks and flashing eyes.

“Go,” she said; “try to save your property. It can be saved; it must be; go.”

He hesitated. He looked across at Nell Barnes. She was once more breathing in labored gasps; another convulsion might be coming on.

“And leave you two here in this place with a dying woman, and with all this uproar going on about you? I can not.”

“You must,” cried Honor.

The roar of voices and of the devouring flames had grown louder; the red glare had increased.

“Go,” she entreated, “or I will go myself.”

He gave her a look which told her that he understood and appreciated what she felt.

“I will go,” he said. “I shall send Mrs. Betts and her husband to you. They will be needed.”

They heard him stop in the hall and speak to the man and his wife. They heard Mrs. Betts’s response:

“As soon as we kin dress, Mr. Heathcliff;” and then his tread creaked on the stairs, and Honor gave way to a single passionate sob.

The uproar outside increased. In spite of the violent wind, they could hear the shouts of excited voices, the rattle of engines, the quick tones of command. The street below was full of hurrying figures. The light of the burning factory made every face plainly visible. Standing at



the window, eagerly watching and listening, Honor saw a man run across the street and look back in a wild kind of way. He was bare-headed, his long hair was streaming in the wind, his movements denoted the wildest excitement. It was Nick Woods. He had just emerged from the tenement building, which he had entered with a sinister design, or rather impulse; his excitement had reached too high a pitch since the fire began to admit of his forming any plan. His present actions were the outcome of fanatic madness.

Honor was listening to the sounds that came from the direction of the fire.

“What can be the reason the engines are not subduing the flames?” she cried. “There must be some difficulty about the water-pipes. The fire is no doubt spreading. The factory is surrounded with wooden buildings.”

What she said was confirmed by the voices of those passing in the street below. The firemen, assisted by the crowd, were using every endeavor to keep the flames from extending to the surrounding buildings.

A cry from Kildee brought Honor back to the bed. Nell Barnes’s last struggle had begun. It was long and terrible. The two women forgot everything else in their efforts to give what help and ease they could to her in this ghastly trial. They did not hear, or at least did not heed what went on outside. No one came to their assistance. The fire seemed to be the one center of attraction.

There was no more water in the pitcher, and Kildee went to the adjoining room, a sky-lighted closet-like apartment, to look for some. She stumbled over something lying in a heap upon the floor. She bent down and found it was a female—dead she thought at first, until the alcoholic fumes of the breath reached her. She held the lamp close to the figure and recognized the face. It was that of a young factory girl whom the superintendent had lately turned away because of drunkenness and irregular conduct. Kildee conjectured that the girl had come into the house in a half-



conscious condition, found her way into this room instinctively and dropped into a drunken sleep.

She had no time now to think of this sinful sister. She could do no more than put a roll of clothes under her head. All her attention was demanded by the dying woman. Honor assisted her in silence, and with tremulous hands. Death was something the general's daughter had rarely seen. The present experience was a new and dreadful one to her, yet she did not shrink from it.

Moments went by. There was a sudden increase in the commotion just outside. The cry of "Fire! fire!" was repeated again. There was a rush of feet overhead and in the passage of the tenement house. Some one threw open the door and yelled, "Fire!" Kildee looked inquiringly at Honor.

"It is only that another of the buildings around the factory has caught on fire," said the elder girl, reassuringly. "Probably one nearer to this house. There is no occasion for present alarm. There are several houses between here and the mill."

As she spoke she rose and shut the door that had been flung open. The noises outside grew louder and more confused; the roaring and crackling sound of flames more audible. The air in the room grew thick with smoke.

"The burning house must be nearer than I thought," murmured Honor, almost gasping in the stifling atmosphere. The struggles of the dying woman still continued and still the girls worked with her, rubbing her with brandy, holding her head up and wiping the froth from her lips.

The roaring of the fire grew louder, the heat, the smoke became unbearable, and the uproar of voices in the street became deafening. Kildee ran to the door and threw it open. She shrieked aloud. The passage was filled with thick, blinding smoke. Through it she saw a sight that struck terror to her soul—the red glare of flames. She groped her way to the head of the stairs. Below was a gulf



of fire and smoke. The stairs were in flames. She ran back and caught Honor by the arm.

“We are lost,” she cried. “The house is on fire. All below is in flames.”

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

HEATHCLIFF had hurried to the burning factory, but it was too late for his individual exertions to be of any avail. The firemen were there with their engines, but before they arrived, the flames had gained such headway that they could not be checked. Heathcliff could only look on with folded arms and stern lips while his property was swept to destruction.

The red, roaring carnival of flame went on within the brick walls; scarlet tongues leaped from every window, floors fell in, one after another, with deafening crash, until the building was crowned and turreted with triumphant fire.

But before this climax was reached, the mayor had ceased to contemplate his burning mill. The feeling of humanity, so strong in his breast, roused him to the assistance of others. The flames were spreading. The wind was whirling the red fire-flakes in every direction, the heat was intense; the utmost exertions of the firemen, assisted by the confused, shouting crowd, were insufficient to prevent the fire from being communicated to the shops, dwelling-houses and other buildings contiguous to the factory.

The two tenement buildings owned by Heathcliff, he believed, were in no immediate danger. They were two blocks away from the scene of the fire. Honor and Kildee were safe.

He threw off his coat, and cheered the workmen by his own personal exertions and courage. He mounted to the roofs of buildings, knocked off burning shingles, helped to



envelop the smoking walls in wet blankets, and when these efforts were useless, he assisted to save the property of the poor tenants and to soothe the terrified women and children.

In the midst of the scene of confusion, a terrible cry came to his ears. He had a little sobbing child on one arm, with the other he supported its pale mother, who had been borne out from her sick bed.

“Brown Roost on fire,” shouted a voice.

Another and another took up the cry.

Heathcliff hastily transferred his charge to others. Brown Roost was the name of the tenement house in which he had left Kildée and Honor.

Nick Woods, in his mad malignance, and unknown to his accomplices, had fired the building an hour ago, by wrenching off a broken shutter from a window on the ground-floor—the grocery store—breaking the glass with a blow, and throwing in a bag of shavings saturated with coal oil. In the darkness of the alley in which he stood, he did this without discovery. Returning half an hour after to see the progress of his work, he was not satisfied, although smoke was pouring from the broken window, and the dull roar and glare inside told plainly that the flames were at work. He feared the alarm would be given before the fire had taken firm hold, and the building be saved. He would quicken the progress of the destructive agent. He crept up the stairs that gave on the street. The rear of the dark unlighted passage on the second floor was filled with combustible articles. The tenants had made it a sort of lumber-room. Baby cradles and carriages, a painter’s oil can, barrels and boxes empty or partly filled with coal and rubbish occupied the space under the staircase which led to the third floor—that in which the room of Nell Barnes was situated. To saturate those easily kindled articles with oil and apply a lighted match was the work of a second. Then with a furtive look about him, the incendiary slunk away.

No one discovered the fire in Brown Roost until it had



begun to rage fiercely in the lower story; until the flames kindled in the rear of the passage had fastened on the wood-work and begun to eat their way through the staircase of the third story. Attention had been concentrated upon the conflagration two blocks away. Every male tenant of the Roost, and the greater number of the women, had gone to the scene of the burning factory. Other women were engaged quieting their frightened children. When at length it was discovered that the building was on fire, the alarm ran from room to room with marvelous quickness. In five minutes Brown Roost was vacated by every human being—except those who were in No. 27—a woman in the last agonies of death, two awe-stricken girls who bent over her, paying little heed to the fresh alarm of fire, and the young woman who lay in a drunken stupor on the floor of the little “dark room.”

When Heathcliff reached the Roost the flames were licking their red tongues from every window of the ground-floor. A motley throng filled the street in front of the building. He sent his eye swiftly over the crowd.

“The women in No. 27,” he cried. “Nell Barnes and the women who were with her, are they safe?”

There was silence for an instant; then a loud hoarse voice shouted:

“I burst open the door and hollered to them that the house was afire. They didn’t ’pear to mind it. They jest looked around. I made sure though they’d save themselves; but—”

Heathcliff was already half-way up the first flight of stairs. A dozen voices yelled to him:

“You can’t get to them. The passage and the stairs are all afire.”

Flame and smoke indeed filled the narrow passage. He burst through them; the stairs were burning, but not yet destroyed. Would they bear his weight? He took no time to think. Lowering his head and closing his eyes, he



sprung up the steps through the scorching flames. Dense smoke filled the third story hall. He found his way through it to the open door of No. 27. Dimly through the smoke he saw the faces of the two girls by the bed. They were scarcely less ghastly than the face of the just dead woman, who sat propped upright with staring eyes and fallen jaw.

Horror at the sight of that death-scene, the shock of terror at the sudden realization of danger, together with the stifling smoke, had almost deprived Honor of consciousness. Kildee was supporting her half-fainting form and trying to rouse her to try to escape. Honor's white face looked death-like to Heathcliff.

"Honor, my darling!" he cried, as his eye fell upon her. His voice partly aroused her; she turned her eyes upon him; her look was dazed and semi-conscious.

"We will die together," she murmured.

"I will save you," he answered. He caught her in his arms, hurriedly he drew her shawl about her face and body to protect them from the flames.

"Come," he cried to Kildee. "Wrap the blanket there around your head. Come."

He looked around when at the door. She was not beside him.

"Kildee," he besought. "Come for Heaven's sake. We shall be too late."

"Go on," she cried. "I will follow you."

There was not a second to lose. He pushed on carrying his half-conscious burden. He reached the head of the stairs; below seemed a fiery gulf. The staircase was a ladder of fire. He plunged on; through the scorching, blistering flames. He felt the half-burned stairs giving way beneath his feet, and with one desperate leap, he cleared them and reached the landing below. At the same instant, the stairs fell in with a dull crash, and the flames danced high in their mad glee.

Honor was safe. But Kildee!



“There is escape by way of the windows,” was the hope that flashed into Heathcliff’s mind as he bore Honor Montcalm down the second-floor flight of stairs and gave her in charge of some women. A glance at the burning house told him the fire had made fearful progress. The wind was blowing fiercely, the timbers were dry as tinder from the protracted drought; the quantities of inflammable material contained in the grocery store—bacon, lard, oil, turpentine—had fed the voracious flames. The ground story was already consumed, a portion of the upper floor had fallen in, the walls outside were a mass of fire, and the flames were greedily licking the windows of the third story. Yet but a few minutes had elapsed since the fire was discovered. No engines or ladders had arrived. Messengers had been sent to bring them, but the firemen were all at work amid intense excitement at the scene of the earlier fire, which was spreading despite their efforts.

“A ladder, a hundred dollars to the man who will bring me a ladder,” a voice was shouting in strong, ringing tones.

Heathcliff turned and saw Carleon. Bare-headed, death-white his face shone in the strong red light of the flames. He had just reached the scene of the fire, to which he had hurried at the first alarm, remembering that he had seen Kildee enter the house two hours before. She was still within its blazing walls, so he gathered from the exclamations of the crowd. He must save her or die in the effort.

Close beside Carleon Heathcliff saw the livid face of Max Rubin and the dazed, pitiably woful countenance and streaming white hair of St. Peter.

A ladder was brought; it was placed against the burning wall; alas! it was greatly too short. It reached scarcely to the second story.

Carleon sent a glance upward at the flame-wreathed windows of the room which held the girl—a glance of despair.



No face appeared there. Had she been already suffocated by the smoke and heat or was she dead of terror?

“Bring on the ladder. Come,” he suddenly cried. He pushed his way through the crowd in the direction of the rear of the building, followed by Max and two men who bore the ladder.

There was a cry: “The engines are coming!”

The crowd gave a joyful shout, but it proved a false report. Neither engines nor ladders came, though many messengers had been sent for them. When they did come it would be too late. The people realized this with sickening horror. It was probable the girl inside was already dead. She gave no sign. In vain the crowd shouted and threw stones at the windows. Nothing of her was seen, and no sound came from the burning house but the roar of destroying flames.

## CHAPTER XL.

MADGE WILDE, the ex-factory girl, still lay upon the floor of the “dark room” attached to No. 27. The tumult in the street, the roar of the fast approaching death had not roused her from her drunken stupor. No one knew she was there but Kildee. In the moment when the girl knew the extremity of her peril and was about to follow the instinct of self-preservation, the thought of Madge had flashed across her mind.

“I can not leave her to be burned to death. I must try to save her,” was Kildee’s impulse. She ran to the prostrate figure on the floor and shook her roughly. Without effect. She dashed water into the fair, bloated face, but the girl only started, opened her brown eyes in a dull stare, and muttering a few words, sunk back on the floor.

The smoke had helped to increase her stupor. She breathed stertorously, like one in an apoplectic fit. Kildee



looked at her in despair. At last she grasped her beneath the shoulders, and half lifting her, dragged her into the front room, where at least there were windows, and the air might help to rouse her. In the effort to drag the dead weight, Kildee's strength was exhausted. She remained for a minute gasping for breath in the thick, hot atmosphere.

Suddenly the drunken girl half started from her stupor. She seemed partially to realize what was going on. She tried to rise, but she could not move her limbs. In terrified half-consciousness she clung to the girl who was losing her small chance to escape in her efforts to save this unfortunate. Madge had clutched her; was holding her with vise-like grasp. Kildee could hear her name shouted below, could hear the rattle of stones against the glass thrown to attract her to the window, but she could not go; she was held in that spasmodic grasp. She tried to cry out, but her voice failed after a husky utterance. Her throat was parched, her strength was gone. The heat, the smoke, were suffocating. She felt herself swooning. She tried to utter a prayer. She struggled once more to free herself, to rouse from her nervelessness. Life seemed suddenly very sweet. A little while ago, when she saw her doubts confirmed, and knew that Honor Montcalm and not herself was loved by Heathcliff, she had envied the dying Nell Barnes, but now young life and hope asserted their strength. She saw the flames reaching their red arms in at the windows, close to the bed where the dead still sat upright and stared with glazed, awful eyes. A flame, more daring than the rest, caught a fold of the mosquito-bar; in a second the bed was in a blaze. Once more a shriek rose to Kildee's burning throat, but died there in a feeble croak. Her brain swam, thought, pulse failed, and she sunk upon the breast of Madge, who still held her with convulsed fingers.

“Kildee!”



The strong, clear voice touched her failing senses, but it seemed the clarion-call of a spirit in some other world.

“Kildee, where are you? I have come to save you.”

She did not recognize the voice. She was too nearly lifeless, but she tried to answer it, to make some sign, but in vain.

“Ah, thank God!” cried the voice close at her side.

Strong arms encircled her, tore her from the clutch of the factory girl, lifted her tenderly, bore her out of the room, down the smoke-filled passage, into which flames were leaping from the hall below, down to the rear end of the passage, which terminated in a large double window open to the floor. On the sill of this window rested one end of a ladder; the other end was held by two men on the flat roof of a building just across the street, or rather across the narrow alley that ran along the rear of the Roost. It was the same ladder which had proved too short to reach Nell Barnes's room. The men, at Carleon's command, had caught it up, ran with it around to the rear alley, carried it up to the roof of the store-house opposite the burning Roost, and succeeded in projecting it across the space—not twenty feet—and lodging it on the sill of the large passage-window.

Along this frail bridge, vibrating in the wind, and at a dizzy height from the ground, Carleon had crossed three minutes before, walking with light, quick tread, and steadily carried head, while the spectators watched him with breathless anxiety. Upon this swaying bridge he now stepped again, bearing the unconscious girl. A hush of suspense fell upon all who beheld the feat. He could no longer balance himself with his arms, he must trust to the steadiness of his eye and his nerve. He moved cautiously, yet lightly, for the ladder creaked warningly under his feet, and quivered when there came a gust of wind. The spectators watched each step with bated breath. When the last was taken, and rescuer and rescued were safe upon the roof, a loud huzza of relief and applause burst from their lips.



Carleon deposited his burden in the waiting arms of Max.

“She has only swooned from heat and terror; take her at once to a place where it is cool and quiet,” he said.

“But you—what are you about to do?” cried Max, as Carleon turned and again put his foot on the ladder.

“I am going back. There is another woman in the burning house.”

Once more he began the perilous passage. This time the eyes of the spectators followed him with more confidence. He reached the middle of the ladder—passed it, was almost ready to step upon the window-sill, when a round gave way; he lost his balance, tried to regain it, failed, wavered an instant and fell.

The body struck the earth with a heavy thud. It moved convulsively an instant, and then lay still. A groan of horror burst from the lookers-on. They pressed around the prostrate form, so lately proudly erect and full of daring grace. They gazed at the white face, and the awe-struck whisper ran from one to another:

“He is dead!”

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## CHAPTER XLI.

THE rescue of Kildee and the subsequent tragedy had been witnessed by comparatively few. They had taken place in the alley at the back of the Roost, and the crowd were in front of the building. They were there absorbed in shouting, staring, and making confused efforts to reach the third story room in which it was known that a human being, a young girl—the prospective bride of the mayor—was being suffocated, roasted alive.

The minutes that had elapsed since Heathcliff bore Honor from the burning house seemed hours to him, so much suspense, agony and futile action had been crowded into them.

Scorched, blistered, and with sprained instep—the result



of his leap from the burning stairs—he had yet worked with desperate energy. But the confusion of the crowd made them senseless. He had dispatched messenger after messenger to bring the fire engines and their life-saving hook and ladder accompaniment; he had made repeated efforts to reach the already burning windows of No. 27, while he shouted Kildee's name above the noise of the fire and the babel of voices.

When at length (after moments which seemed an eternity) a fire-engine, followed by a hook and ladder truck, dashed through the shouting crowd, the windows of the third-story were all ablaze. Flames seemed to fill that room to which all eyes were directed. No face had appeared at the window; a single stifled scream had been heard; after that all was still.

At once the engines began to play upon the windows of No. 27. Almost at the same instant the long threatened rain, which the wind had held in check—descended in torrents. The floods from the clouds and the streams from the engine-pipes operated to subdue the fire. While it still raged, a ladder had been adjusted to one of the windows of the third-story apartment and nimble firemen had ascended and made their way into the room. They found the bed in a blaze; on the floor beside it lay a woman's form enveloped in flames. A water-saturated blanket was thrown around the body and it was borne down to the street. There, in the strong glare, the blanket was partially unfolded. A horrible sight was disclosed: a blackened, half-consumed body, the clothing destroyed, the hair burned, the face raw, literally roasted, features partly gone, unrecognizable. But in one clinched hand was clasped a watch with a chain attached. Heathcliff knew the jewel-studded watch, which was also a case for his mother's picture. He had given it to Kildee only the evening before. She had worn it for the first time at the theater last night.



He groaned and covered his face. He had not needed this confirmation. He knew before that this ghastly object found by the bed of Nell Barnes could be no other than the remains of the beautiful, spirituelle girl who was to have been his bride in the morning whose dawn was now at hand.

None but Kildee had known of the ex-factory girl's presence in Nell Barnes's "dark room." She was nearly the size and shape of Kildee; no one doubted that this was the corpse of the little nurse who had been well loved in Factory Row. The watch held in the crisped fingers was itself sufficient proof. That watch had remained in the grasp of the convulsed, suffocating Madge, when Carleon had torn Kildee from her.

News of the rescue of a woman from the back part of the house had flashed through the crowd, but little inquiry was made concerning the woman. She was a factory hand, her family had taken her away. So much was told, but further interest in the rescue was lost in horror at Carleon's fate and at the close pressing horror of the doom that had overtaken the favorite of Factory Row on her bridal-day.

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## CHAPTER XLII.

IMMEDIATELY on receiving Kildee in his arms, Max bore her down the stairs from the roof of the old building, which, though now a store-house, had been long ago an elegant private mansion. From this roof in those days came, on moonlit or starry nights, the silvery tinkle of guitars and the sweet laughter of the daughters of Dr. Castally, sitting there or promenading with their lovers.

On reaching the street, Max was fortunate enough to find a hack into which he at once put Kildee, who had partially revived in the fresher air, and placing himself by her side, directed the man to drive to the Marshall House.



Before the hotel was reached, Kildee had recovered and was able to walk to Lottie's room.

The little actress had neither gone off with the company nor yet retired to rest. She was waiting in a little flutter of nervous suspense for the "something" to occur which she had declared she felt "in her blood" would happen. The rest of the troupe had left on the midnight train, but Lottie had decided to stay and learn the issue of that interview which Max (as he had told her) would have with Kildee. If Kildee did decide to relinquish her prospect of a splendid marriage for the sake of Max and the old stage life (Lottie was romantic and thought it possible), then she must be here to receive and welcome her darling. She made a plausible excuse to the manager and promised to leave on the early morning express and join the company in time for the evening performance at the town where they would play.

She was up sitting at the window of her room, tapping the floor impatiently with her little foot. The fire in the city, the glare of the burning buildings, the ringing of bells, and shouting had helped to increase her nervousness. She jumped up and came swiftly to the door in response to Max's knock. When she saw Kildee she gave a little scream of delighted surprise, and embraced her rapturously. Then she put her back a little that she might scrutinize her face—might see if she looked content after her renunciation.

"Good heavens, you are pale as death!" she cried. "Your hair, your eyes—why, what—"

"Hush!" cried Max. "She has just passed the gates of death. She was in the burning building. She was rescued after she was insensible, nearly dead. Put her to bed at once. Postpone all questions; don't let her talk to you. No, *mon enfant*, not a word," he said, as Kildee caught his arm.

"Yes; one word, Max. Tell me, was it you who saved me?"



“No; it was not I. I wanted to go across the ladder, but he wouldn’t permit it. He ordered me back, saying he was more practiced than I.”

“Who?”

“His name was Carleon; do you know him?”

“Yes. Oh, Max, I must see him and thank him.”

“So you shall. Go to bed now; you are in a fever,” answered Max hastily.

He did not want her to know the fate that had befallen her rescuer. She was already too much agitated.

“Good-night,” he said, and he pressed her hand to his lips.

Lottie took her in hand. She undressed her, bathed her burning face in cool rose-water, combed out the tangled curls, and put her to bed.

“Now, don’t lie there letting your mind make wild pictures,” she said, as she leaned over her charge, and kissed the quivering lips and eyelids. “Be a blank, instant; I command it; and so remain until morning.”

It was a piece of self-denial on Lottie’s part, for she was dying to know what had passed between Kildee and Max, and if the grand-looking mayor had been given up, and if there had been a romantic scene. Her imagination was busy while she finished her own packing, and laid out her traveling-dress ready to put on in the morning. She turned then to Kildee’s clothes. She shook out the folds of her pretty kilted skirt of dark green and hung it up. She took up the basque; a folded paper fell at her feet. She picked it up, looked at it, and said to herself:

“Kildee must have had this in the bosom of her dress. I will put it away for her.”

She lifted the lid of her trunk, and thrust the paper into the pocket of the top. She forgot all about it, and Kildee, believing that the paper had dropped from the folds of her dress, and been burned, said nothing to remind Lottie of finding it. It was the paper that Heathcliff and Honor had signed—the testimony relating to Kildee’s birth.



In the confusion, after the factory was known to be on fire, the paper had been swept from the table, and Kildee had picked it up from the floor, and thrust it into her bosom.

The little actress was up betimes next morning, but she rose noiselessly, and tripped about with bird-like movements, fearing to wake Kildee, who was sleeping peacefully at last. Though she lay so quietly all night, Lottie knew by her breathing that she had not slept. She saw, too, as she looked at her pale face in the morning light, that there were traces of tears on her cheeks.

“Perhaps she loved Heathcliff, after all, but she felt bound to Max. I wish I knew all about it,” thought Lottie, as she stood before the mirror, gathering up her crinkly, nut-brown hair. A boy brought her the morning paper, which she had ordered sent to her early, that she might read what the saucy dramatic reporter had said of the play last night, and of her especial rôle. She had read his pert comments, and dismissed them with a toss of her pretty nose, and she was reading, with interest, the account of the fire, when a soft tap sent her to the door. Max stood there, looking excited and feverish, outside the partly opened door.

“Is Kildee awake?” he asked.

Lottie put her finger on her lip, and shook her head.

“I see you have the morning paper. I wanted to warn you against letting Kildee see it—the account of the fire, I mean. It contains a shocking incident, for one thing, and a ghastly mistake; it announces that Kildee was burned to death.”

“Why, how did that happen? Didn’t they know she was saved?”

“Nobody knew who it was that was rescued. The tenement house was only half burned, and a body, partly consumed, was found in the room Kildee is known to have been in. The face could not be recognized, but the body



was near Kildee's size and shape. She was the only one known to have been in the room with the sick woman; and, besides—which is a strange circumstance—Kildee's watch was found on the body of the burned girl. No one doubted it was she, it seems. Heathcliff had the body carried to his home, and it will be interred to-day in the family burial-plot."

"This is shocking. What distress the poor man must be suffering. Of course, Max, you will go at once and tell him she is alive and well."

"Of course," Max echoed, thoughtfully.

"Lottie," called Kildee from the bed.

Lottie left Max standing outside the door, and bent over the little white face and dark head on the pillow. Kildee put her arms around her foster-sister's neck, and drew her close to her.

"Tell Max not to undeceive Mr. Heathcliff," she said. Then in answer to the look of amazement in Lottie's wide blue eyes, she whispered:

"I do not want him to know. I will go away with you this morning, and he will think I am dead, and—"

Her voice faltered.

"You will do this to escape marrying him, Kildee? You did not love him, then?"

The girl's pallid face became suffused with color. She drew Lottie closer that the blue eyes might not search hers.

"How could a girl like me love one so far above her in wisdom and age and position? I was no match for him. And then, there was another—"

"Ah!" Lottie said, "another woman?"

"Yes; she loves him and he loves her. Through a strange chance—I can't tell you what it was—I came between them. They will be reunited now; they never would be if I should stay. He would marry me through sympathy and for his word's sake, and she would have him do it



because of her pride. It is better that both should think me dead. I can be dead to them and to the few who knew me here without its mattering any—thanks to my insignificance. So tell Max, dear Lottie. Ask him to beg Mr. Carleon not to betray that it was I he saved—if indeed he recognized me. It seems he did not, or they would have known.”

Lottie went back to Max and told him Kildee's request.

“It doesn't seem right,” she said gravely.

But Max was thrilling all over with the thought that Kildee was not to be married that day, that she was to go away with him—that he was to have his darling back. No stratagem should ever get her away from him now.

“You will tell Mr. Carleon,” asked Lottie.

Max sunk his voice to a whisper.

“Mr. Carleon would not know,” he answered. “He fell, trying to recross the ladder after he had rescued Kildee. He was taken up for dead, but was not dead. He was alive this morning, the paper says, but insensible, with scarce a shadow of hope for him—poor fellow. He acted grandly last night. I don't want Kildee to know of the catastrophe until she has recovered from the shock.”

An hour later, Kildee was dressed for traveling—Lottie supplying whatever was needed in making her toilet. Lottie ordered breakfast sent up to them, and persuaded Kildee to eat something. They put on their hats, Kildee tying a veil over her face, and joined Max in the hall. The carriage was waiting. He took them out to it. A few men who were on the veranda stared at the two “well-shaped actress girls,” none of them suspecting that one of these was the supposed victim of the fire they were reading about.

When they were in the carriage, Kildee turned to Max.

“Did you speak to Mr. Carleon? Did he promise—”

Max nodded.

“He will never tell. You need not be afraid,” he said.



He did not say that he had written her request and left it in a sealed envelope to be given to Carleon, in case he recovered his senses. The man in whose hands he left the letter was a minister, who had been praying beside Carleon's bed when Max entered. He was a very unclerical person as to dress and looks. He might have passed for a soldier in the garb of the *bourgeoisie*. His eyes had a restless, repressed fire in their depths. But they were softened as with tears when he bent over the white, unconscious face.

"God's will be done," he muttered; "but I thought *He* had a great work for this man to do in his vineyard."

The unclerical-looking preacher was Sam Brown. He came to Carleon's bedside as soon as he heard of what had happened. The brusque looks and words of the physicians—one of them an agnostic, the other a cultured, cynical disciple of Voltaire—had no effect upon him. He remained day and night in that room over which the Death Angel hovered, praying, watching, nursing, lifting the bruised and broken frame in his strong arms, so tenderly helpful that the physicians ceased to sneer, and put up with the "parson's prayers" for the sake of his cool nerve and intelligent comprehension as an assistant.

Kildee kept her veil down during her drive to the depot. Lottie suspected she was crying. She longed to look into the girl's heart and know if she really did not care for the man she was to have married on this day—so fair after last night's storm. Kildee's voice, usually so sweet, was husky when she spoke.

"There is one thing that distresses me about going away—St. Peter, I hate so to leave him behind. I know he will be taken care of, but he will miss—"

Max laughed out. "Catch a weasel asleep," he said. "St. Peter is not left behind."

"Why, where is he?"

"Safe in the smoking-car of our train. I left him there ten minutes ago—fiddle, Zack, and all. He found me last



night and knew me. He stuck to me through everything. When I got with you into the carriage, he climbed up beside the driver and rode with us to the hotel. Where he stowed himself last night I don't know, but the first thing I heard this morning was the fiddle. We have all three of our prodigals back—you and your two protégés—and I feel happy enough to kill a dozen fatted calves. Everything is as it was before."

"Everything is as it was before." Lottie repeated the words to herself doubtingly as she looked at Kildee. Her "child" was here beside her, gentle, lovely as before, but yet not the same. She would never be the same, Lottie said to herself. Those dark, sweet eyes held a secret. Could not Max tell it in the very tone of the gentle voice—that low yet intense vibrating chord, indescribably tender and sad—that chord had been unknown to Kildee's voice before!

"She has suffered," said Lottie in her own little sympathizing heart. "She *did* love that man. She has given him up because she thinks he loves that other woman and will be happier with her. Poor Max. But he is so good and so devoted to her, she can't help caring for him. They will marry at last, and be happy."

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## CHAPTER XLIII.

THE funeral of the supposed Miss Gonzalis—*fiancée* of Mayor Heathcliff—was largely attended. The remains of the poor factory girl received a stately burial, and more than one heart was heavy with grief as they were lowered into the earth. Mme. Jean and her husband stood hand in hand looking on with tears streaming down their faces. Monsieur had brought all the flowers his little garden boasted. He put them on the coffin just before it was lowered. Miss Faust, sitting alone in Heathcliff's carriage at a dis-



tance from the grave, heard the clods fall with a strong shudder and sobbed behind her double veil.

Heathcliff himself stood beside the grave, his hat drawn over his eyes. He had not slept for many hours; his heart ached for the loss of the girl who had so endeared herself to him—who was to-day to have been his wife. He had meant to cherish her tenderly; in caring for her happiness, in seeing her ripen under kindly influences, he had hoped to find compensation for what he had lost in losing the supreme love of his life.

His face was blistered, his hair and beard scorched by the fiery ordeal of last night. One arm had been so badly burned that he was forced to have it in a sling. Honor Montcalm saw him from her carriage. She watched him furtively from behind her veil, and in her heart she formed a resolve.

That evening she went to her father in his study. He laid down his pen and looked up anxiously at her as she came toward him in her white dress.

“You are looking badly, my dear. You have not gotten over that horrible fright. It has made you lose your roses.”

“Some others have suffered a far greater loss from last night’s disaster, dear papa. I came an hour since from the funeral of the girl who lost her life.”

“You ought not to have gone out; it was imprudent.”

“Papa,” she said abruptly, “is your heart very much set upon being governor?”

He looked at her with much surprise.

“Why do you ask such a question?”

“I should not think you would care so much for the honor; you were in public life so long. You held a national position; this state office must not seem to you an honor to be greatly prized.”

“It is no mean honor to be put over such a state as this by her people’s choice—my native state, too. But what



are you aiming at? You have some point you want to make. Come to it at once. Don't beat about the bush; ordinary women do that, and you are not an ordinary woman."

"Forgive me, papa; I will come to the point. I want you to withdraw from the gubernatorial campaign—withdraw in favor of Mr. Heathcliff."

"The man whom you were obliged to reject because, as you told me, he was unworthy to be my son-in-law?"

"The man, father, to whom I owe my life—who, because of you and me, has lost his young bride and a part of his fortune."

"How because of you and me?"

"Oh, papa, you must know it was those disaffected workmen who burned his houses; and they were wrought upon to do it by the inflammable speeches and misrepresentations of Hazard Hall and his kindred spirits, working for your election—working outside your knowledge or authority, I know—but still working for *you*. And through me Heathcliff lost the woman whom to-day he was to have married. It was my bitter misfortune that I swooned from the stifling smoke and the shock of fright—and in saving me she was left to perish. It is but justice that we should do what we can to make up for what he has lost through us."

The general listened to her with a changing countenance. His keen eagle-eye searched her face.

"Honor," he said at length, "do you still love Ira Heathcliff?"

A wave of crimson swept over her face; her eyes flashed a little.

"Father," she answered, "can a woman have no other motive for wishing a just act to be done to a man? You have taught me to put honor above love. I consider that your—that my honor is concerned in this matter. This man has lost heavily through us. He has saved my life, at



nearly the cost of his own. There is only one reparation we can make him—let him have this office which is much to him—whose foot is but just on the ladder of political importance, and but little to you who stand near its top. But for you his election would be sure. Under these circumstances, does not honor require you to withdraw?”

The general was silent. His daughter's arguments affected him less than her simple wish. He had never disregarded her wishes. At length he said:

“You don't know the magnitude of what you ask, my dear. This thing has gone a good way. My friends have not spared money or effort in my behalf. I have no right to withdraw from this contest without consulting them. I promise you that I will lay the matter before them, and if they think I can honorably take my name from the ticket, I will do it.”

She came nearer to him and said earnestly:

“Father, if the money that has been spent for you by your friends is all that stands in the way of your withdrawal, can not I remove that? Remember I have grandmother's legacy. It is mine, you said, to do with as I please. It is in stocks or bonds or something. Take it and repay your friends. Cancel your money obligations to them.”

“Honor, remember this is nearly all your fortune. Are you really willing to have it sacrificed?”

“I am ready to have it used by my father in canceling obligations that stand in the way of his fulfilling a duty.”

The general looked at her with misty eyes. But he thought it necessary to curb her too generous impulses.

“For a woman of good sense, you have very Utopian ideas, my child.”

“They are not Utopian, my father. *You* taught them to me; that was years ago. Of late—father, don't let selfish, reckless spirits influence you in this matter. I



know how they will sneer. They sneer at every feeling of obligation higher than mere self or party interest."

"You are meaning Hazard Hall. Poor fellow; you always have been hard upon him. You can never do justice to that gifted boy. You are prejudiced—jealous, my Honor."

"It is not personal jealousy, father. True, I have always been first in your heart, and deemed this was of right my place. And I have felt a little forsaken and thrust out of late. But it is not this; it is that I do not want that boy—gifted, I grant you—to inoculate you with the poison of his lax principles, his narrow self-seeking, his recklessness of the claims and rights of any who may chance to stand in his way. This may be the spirit of the new political methods—but you, my father, belong to the old-fashioned school, which recognizes a higher motive than self-interest, which looks to the good of the people whose suffrages may have placed you over them. In the vocabulary of that purer school there is still such a word as honor—honor that refuses to take unfair advantage, or to make use of a stepping-stone unless it be clean; honor that bears on its shield the grand motto '*noblesse oblige*.' In the face of that motto my father can not but withdraw his claim to this office in favor of a man whom he has unwittingly injured, and to whom he owes a heavy obligation—his daughter's life."

The light of the full moon came in at the window and she stood in its soft stream, tall, pure, stately. The moonlight seemed to emanate from her. General Montcalm stretched out his arms and drew her to him. It was long since he had held her so. He was proud of his high-souled daughter, yet he was not prepared to grant her request.

"What a capital special pleader at the bar was spoiled when Fate wronged you in the matter of sex, my love," he said, when he had pressed his soldierly mustached lips to her cheek. "'Almost thou persuadest me'—not quite, my



dear. I must consult my friends; it is their due. If I can obtain their concurrence I will withdraw for your sake."

"For honor's sake, papa."

"For honor's sake—and Honor's," he said, smiling as he kissed her once more, and put her gently from him.

With this promise she was forced to be content.

Hazard Hall dropped in next morning as usual, and the general broached the matter of the withdrawal to him.

"It is what I expected to hear," cried the young favorite. "It is your daughter's work. I recognize a woman's quixotic notions in the scheme. I know Miss Honor's lofty, but, pardon me, wholly impracticable ideas, and I felt sure she would suggest this folly to you. Folly it would certainly be. You are sure of being elected. You are the man the state wants. What does that fellow Heathcliff, with his machinist mind, know about administering state affairs? Then you are bound to your friends. You are pledged to your backers. You owe something to them and to the exponents of independent party views. You are the backbone of these. You were late in coming out; then your friends rallied around you—heart and soul—and purse. How can you go back on them without dishonor?"

"The money obligations would be repaid of course," the general said coldly.

Hazard looked at him quickly. Instantly his shrewd thought divined that Honor Montcalm had offered her money to repay her father's backers if he should retire from the field. He uttered an inward oath. He set it down as due to her unquenched love for this hated Heathcliff. Would her folly undo all his work in this campaign—make null the aims he was so confident of attaining?

He saw his game about to be lost and instantly resolved on a bold throw.

It was rather premature, but he would risk it. He threw up his handsome head that had been bent in thought and walked up to his patron.



“General,” he said in his penetrative, impressive way, “before you haul down your colors in favor of Heathcliff, let me ask how you, a patriot, devoted to your state, will like being instrumental in putting over that state, as its ruler, a man who is accessory to a black crime—a man who harbors as his mistress a woman who is the murderer of her husband.”

The general started as though a shell had burst at his feet.

“Hazard Hall,” he cried, “what do you mean? Speak; are you simply mad, or do you mean my brother’s murdereress.”

“I mean Laura Montcalm, who is concealed in this city by his honor—the Mayor of Wallport.”

“Do you make that assertion recklessly, or have you a shadow of proof?”

“I speak what I know. In one week from to-day my proofs shall be ready. Postpone your withdrawal until then, and if I do not substantiate what I say, then lay your sure chances at Heathcliff’s feet, and I’ll toss my chapeau in honor of the Machinist Governor.”

“The proofs of what you say. Give them to me now. What is office or anything beside this—this debt I owe my brother—to bring his murderer to punishment. Don’t trifle with me, boy. Where is Laura Montcalm?”

“In one week from to-day, general.”

“Swear to me that she is in the city.”

Hazard thrust his slender fingers into his breast-pocket and took out a small leather-bound pocket-book. Opening its clasped pages, he took out and uncoiled a very slender tress—a few hairs only—but quite long and bright gold in color.

“This hair was growing on Laura Montcalm’s head a few hours ago,” he said. Then in answer to General Montcalm’s fierce, eager look, he said:

“In a week, general, I promise you shall know all.



Promise me in return that you will not withdraw from the field in the meantime."

"You have my promise," the general answered.

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## CHAPTER XLIV.

How came Hazard Hall to be in possession of those golden hairs, which, as he said, had a few hours before been growing on the head of Laura Montcalm? On the evening before Miss Faust had attended the funeral of the supposed Kildee. She had driven to the cemetery in the mayor's carriage—its only occupant. While she sobbed behind her veil, she had fallen under the observing eyes of Hazard Hall, who leaned against a tree, noting everything that passed with an eye to a sensational account in "The Rattler" of the burial of Heathcliff's young bride. Miss Faust was too much distressed to heed his scrutiny. She had turned on her seat and rested her head sideways against the damask-lined back of the carriage. When she would have lifted it there seemed something in the way of her doing so. A portion of her hair or of her veil had caught on some protuberance. She gave a slight jerk and extricated herself; then rather confusedly rearranged her veil and hair. She had not seen Hazard Hall start and lean eagerly forward, snatch a tiny magnifying glass from his pocket, and regard her intently through it. What was it that had caught his eye? A gleam of color in the somber black and gray of Miss Faust's head—a gleam of gold—a gleam of yellow hair, yellow hair under that mass of gray, nearly white locks. How did this happen? It must be that the gray hair was artificial, and the golden hair the wearer's own. But why should the possessor of such lovely hair seek to hide it—why but as a disguise? "If I could touch that hair as well as see it," thought Hazard. He kept his eyes on the carriage and its occupant, but saw



nothing more to feed his suspicion. Before the funeral was quite over, he drove back to the town in the buggy of a friend and had himself put down near the Red House. He took his position not far from the gate, wishing to scrutinize Miss Faust when she descended from the carriage. He leaned against the steep bank topped by the iron-spiked brick wall, and pretended to scribble in his note-book. He had not long to wait. The carriage turned the street corner and drew up in front of the locked gate. Miss Faust alighted; her figure was muffled as usual, and her long, black veil enveloped her. Black gloves covered her hands and wrists, but Hazard saw a small portion of her bare arm just above the gloves, and that small section of arm was dazzlingly white and daintily round.

Caleb was at the great gate, and unlocked and opened it for her. It swung to and fastened with a spring, and the Sphinx passed out of sight into her shadowy home as secluded and unseen in the midst of the city as though it were in the heart of a wilderness. The driver had stared after the singular figure in never-sated curiosity. Before he could gather up the reins and start his horses Hazard Hall had sprung lightly into the carriage. The man turned around and glared at the intruder, but Hazard disarmed him by saying airily as he tossed him a half dollar:

“I’ll ride with you up to Heathcliff’s as long as you haven’t a passenger.”

The man touched his hat. “All right, sir,” he said, and the sleek bays trotted away.

Hazard immediately began an examination of the back of the carriage-seat against which Miss Faust’s head had rested. It was cushioned in green damask and there were ornamental studs here and there of carved silver. One of these protruded unwarrantably, and attached to this Hazard found the object of his search, a few strands of hair. He had felt sure some of the Sphinx’s hair must have been fastened here and been pulled out when she gave that jerk.



Sure enough here it was, and not gray either, but, as he had hoped, yellow and silken. He unfastened them from the silver tack, he smoothed their tangles, felt their softness, and noted their glossy sheen. He said to himself: "This hair never came from the head of an old woman of sixty. Laura Montcalm had just such hair—like the Borgia's tresses of spun gold, so the old general said. *The woman at the Red House is Laura Montcalm in disguise.*" The thought flashed into his brain with the force of conviction, but the next instant he shook his head.

"No, pshaw!—no. It is absurd. Those ugly, deformed features; that great, hooked nose, the purple mark disfiguring one side of her face. Besides, Miss Faust has lived here in the Red House for seven years, and it has only been two years since the Montcalm murder. If this is Laura Montcalm, where is Margaret Faust?"

He mused a moment, then threw up his head in his abrupt way, shaking back his curling hair.

"Once Miss Faust left this city, went back to Germany to see her brother. She went in her secret, silent way; she returned in the same fashion; nobody seems to have seen her when she left, or when she returned—nobody but Heathcliff. It was two years and six months ago that she went; it is just two years since she came back; and it is just two years since Laura Montcalm fled from her home after stabbing her husband with a jeweled toy dagger she had worn all day in her belt. This is a coincidence which is strong enough to hang a suspicion upon. I'll test its strength before I stop."

But he had made no further move up to the next day when he played his bluff game on General Montcalm, in order to prevent that candidate from "backing down," as he phrased it. He had pledged himself to bring proof of Heathcliff's guilt within a week; he must go to work at once. He rushed off to the beach and walked the sandy shore for an hour, hearing the tide roll in with its deep,



soothing murmur. An idea came to him. He went back into the city and stepped into the post-office. He knew the chief official of the delivery department—everybody knew jolly Jack Noel, who had been in the office fifteen years, never forgot a face, or a name, or a date, and was prompt in business as he was ready in tongue.

“Hunting up a victim?” he said when he saw the young journalist and his note-book.

“No: I have just found him,” returned Hazard, taking out his pencil.

“Don’t think to interview me about the post-office irregularities. I’m as mum as—”

“A fig for the irregularities. Everything will be out in spite of the hushing up. But I’m not barking up that tree; I’m trying to find out all I can about our eccentric fellow-citizen, Miss Faust, of the Red House. She is a mystery and a monstrosity; she will make a capital subject for a write-up.”

“What the dragon do I know about her? Never heard her speak, and never saw her in my life except through veils and mufflers.”

“Neither did anybody else. But you can tell me something about her correspondence. She has money and must have business transactions. Does she ever receive registered letters?”

“Never. Nor any letters of any kind the boys tell me, except that one from her brother which took her back to Germany to forgive him on his death-bed. She had quarreled with him, it seems, because he married at the tender age of forty. She holds marriage as a holy horror, it being a closed paradise to her witchship!”

“And her brother died?”

“Yes, she wrote a letter full of remorse, Heathcliff told me. He’s her business manager, you know. I remember the quaint, cramped handwriting and the big black-bordered envelopes covered with foreign stamps. Heathcliff



just got such another letter a few months afterward, and I made sure the old lady was dead this time, but when I met him and asked him he told me she had just got back."

Hazard's eyes gave one of their quick, bright flashes. He had made a mental note of this. He now put the question he had come to ask.

"Where did her brother die?"

"At Heidelberg. He was a professor in the university there. But what the mischief do you want to know all this bosh for?"

"I have to help feed an insatiable monster—public curiosity. Miss Faust is something of a sphinx. I find there is a great eagerness to peer behind her veil literally and metaphorically. I will lift it a little for the public benefit."

"And she will lift you, my boy. They say she's got a devil of a temper."

"I'll make love to her and she'll forgive me," laughed Hazard as he left the room.

He went to the telegraph office and dispatched this message to New York, and thence to Heidelberg, Germany. It was simply the question:

"Is Margaret Faust, sister of Professor Faust, in your city?"

The message was addressed to the Faculty of Heidelberg University.

Hazard waited with feverish impatience for the reply. Three days passed before it came. His fingers shook so he could hardly tear open the envelope, his head swam so he could hardly read the half dozen words. But he did read them, and all the blood in his body rushed to his heart in one throb of triumph. The answer was this:

"Miss Faust has been dead two years."

For a few moments he felt his cause was gained. He was on the point of rushing off to the general, and waving the tell-tale message under his nose, then to the clerk of



the court to get a warrant for the arrest of Laura Montcalm. The triumph of succeeding was his; he thought of it with more elation than of the large reward he could claim, though he by no means undervalued money. But a little reflection toned down his elation. His work was not done. He had in his hand the proof that the woman at the Red House was an impostor, but he did not have the proof that she was Laura Montcalm. And he must possess himself of this beyond a doubt. He had made one *faux pas* in that direction; he would make sure before he next descended on the castle of the Sphinx. He must find some way to gain access to the Red House, spy Miss Faust in her secret boudoir when she had removed her disguise that she might look fair in the eyes of her lover—the worthy mayor—compare her face with that of the picture of Laura Montcalm, and then spring his trap. He took the picture from his pocket and looked at it earnestly as he did every day of his life, for the ripe loveliness of this fair woman was alluring to the eyes of this beauty-worshiper. The picture had, besides, a higher and subtler charm, emanating from the sad, appealing eyes. They seemed to look at him now with sorrowful reproach. He was seeking her life, and she had been so beautiful. She had been so wronged; an unloved wife, scorned and taunted by her husband, threatened by him with disgrace when another day should dawn—perhaps threatened with violence and death. Who knew? Who could tell what had passed between those two that night after her return from the island, when they were alone in the house together?

But not long did any feeling of compassionate hesitation visit the eager, fevered soul of Hazard Hall. Does the hunter stop for pity's sake when the hunted game is in sight, though its innocent sides be panting, its eyes blood-shot, its steps tottering? The blood of this amateur detective was leaping with the excitement of the chase. He set to work on some plan by which he could get access to the



Red House and its mistress. He would take no one in his counsel; he would ask help of no one.

“I will take as my motto what was written over the gates of the Enchanted Castle, ‘Be bold,’” he said. It was a motto that well accorded with his adventurous, audacious spirit.

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## CHAPTER XLV.

HAZARD’S lease of the old dwelling joining yards with the Red House on the rear, though facing a different and narrow connecting street, had not yet expired. He opened the gate leading to this rookery at noon the day after receiving the cablegram from Heidelberg. He wore a blonde wig and mustache that old Caleb might not recognize him as the person who had so often under various pretexts, tried to pass the iron gate of which he was guardian, and who had accompanied the officers with the search warrant. And once before he had deceived old Caleb when he won his way to the Sphinx’s presence under the guise of a legal official taking the census. Since the search of their castle, it was reasonable to suppose that the inmates of the mysterious Red House were on their guard. He must try new tactics. He had provided himself with a light folding ladder which he carried in an artist’s portfolio. Entering the old house, he went to that upper room, at the window of which he had stood with Honor Montcalm on the dark and rainy night when she had seen the golden-haired woman embraced by her betrothed.

He had never entered the room since that night. He had believed the mystery of the blonde woman to be explained by the presence of Kildee in the Red House. Now he felt that he had been duped. He went to the window and through the turned blind he carefully reconnoitered the Red House, building and yard, or that rear portion of it visible from the point of view. He could see no one; the



windows of the secret boudoir had their Venetian shutters closed, to keep out the heated air of noon; but as he listened he heard the sound of a piano lightly touched in the drawing-room situated somewhere in the center of this big, shadowy, isolated house.

From the side of the stone basement protruded the pipe of a stove, and from the mouth of this issued a thin volume of smoke. Patsy, the one woman-servant, was cooking dinner, probably assisted by Caleb, or perhaps that old watch-dog was asleep on a bench somewhere in the shade.

It seemed to Hazard a favorable moment for entering the Enchanted Castle. He made his way down by means of a back staircase, and slipping along through the neglected shrubbery, approached the spiked brick wall dividing this yard from that of the Red House. Taking out his ladder he unfolded it, and deftly adjusted it to the wall in the corner where fig bushes growing rankly on the other side would conceal his movements. He descended the frail-seeming but stout little ladder and leaped lightly on the soft grass inside. He went around to the side of the house and found the door of the basement room, from which he had seen the smoke issuing. An odor of cooking told him he had not been mistaken in thinking that this was a kitchen. He knocked and the door was opened by Caleb. The old negro had been gnawing a bone from the soup pot; he held it now, in one huge wrinkled paw, and his face was shining with grease.

He dropped the bone to the floor in amazement.

“How you git in here, white man? Who dat let you in de gate?”

“Hush! Don’t speak so loud. Are you Caleb Johnson?”

“If I is, what dat to you?”

“Mayor Heathcliff sent me to you. He gave me his key to the gate.”

“What make you neber go in by front way, stiddy com-  
5—2d half.



in' roun' here, slippin' up on colored folks? Dat no way for gentl'mun to do."

"I did not go to the front door because my business here is to be kept secret from Miss Faust; I was not to see her, I was to come to you. See here, here's Mr. Heathcliff's note to you; I presume you know his seal and his handwriting."

Old Caleb didn't know his writing or anybody else's from a hen scratch, but he felt a great access of self-complacency as well as confidence in his visitor when he took in his greasy fingers the big envelope with its immense round seal of red wax. The old-fashioned negro has a superstitious veneration for writing, and a letter is to them like a law edict. Its instructions must be obeyed. He examined the envelope with great gravity, and with so much deliberation that the woman who had left her pots and approached the two said:

"Why doesn't you break dat red sticking-plaster and see de insides, Caleb?"

He gave her a dignified, rebuking look and slowly broke the seal. While he gazed at the hieroglyphic words, Patsy on tiptoe spelled out the line:

"Do what the bearer of this tells you to. It is all right.

"HEATHCLIFF,

"*Mayor of Wallport.*"

"Well, I ain't got nothin' to say. Ef Mayor Heathcliff sent you, and he must, acause he's de onliest one what's got a key to de gate, 'sides me; and ef he tells me to do what you say, and dat paper ses so plain enough, why it's all right, in course. Mayor Heathcliff is de fren' of de lady of de house. Tell me what you wants, sah, dat you mus' be so secrecy about."

"It is just this: Miss Faust has a relation in Germany—an uncle, her only kin, who raised her. He thinks a great deal of her and is anxious to have her picture. But she



always refused to have one taken. She will not even let any one see her without her veil."

"Dat's so. I never see um widout it myself long as I been livin' here. Mighty good reason for keepin' kivered up too. When beauty been giv' out, Miss Faus' wasn't dare."

"But her uncle cares nothing for that. She is of his blood, you see. She is his sister's only child, and he is anxious to have her picture. I am an artist. I draw pictures as fast as you can eat hominy. Mr. Heathcliff has intrusted me to take Miss Faust's picture for her uncle if I can get a chance. 'Go to Caleb,' he said to me. 'Consult with him how to get to Miss Faust and sketch her without her knowing it. Caleb is smart as any lawyer I know of.'"

Caleb's greasy mouth expanded at this compliment.

"De mayor knows a smart man when he sees him," he said, complacently. Then with a gleam of suspicion:

"How come you so eagersome to take de old woman's pickture?" he asked.

"Why? Because it's money in my pocket. I get fifteen dollars for it. That's a pretty good sum to a poor chap like me. But I'll tell you what, Caleb, I'll go halves with you if you can get me the chance to draw the picture. Get me into her bedroom, and I'll sketch her while she is asleep."

"Her bedroom," repeated Caleb, slowly shaking his head. "Why, young man, she'd—"

"She'll never find it out. And it will be just like picking up this five-dollar piece in the road. Look at it—gold, you see—bright and new—none of your paper trash. All I ask of you is to get me inside her bedroom. I'll manage to get out. She is in the parlor now, playing on the piano. After awhile she will come out and go into her room, will she not?"

"Yes, she will," said Patsy, who, at the sight of the



gold had become keenly interested. "She'll go in her room and take a baf and a nap."

"Very well, I must be in the room before she comes. You must let me in, Patsy. Where does she keep the key?"

"In her pocket. I gives it to her soon as I cleans up."

"Well, you must go and ask her to let you have it a moment. Say that you have dropped something belonging to you in there while you were cleaning up. Your Virgin Mary medal, say."

"Good saints! I never get forgiveness if I say dat."

"Yes, you will. You can buy dozens of candles with this," and he held up another gold piece before her greedy eyes.

"Isn't it a good plan, Caleb?" he said, discovering that the old darkey looked glum at being left out in the consultation.

"Y-a-s, I believe it is," cautiously assented Caleb.

"It is a mighty good plan, and I'm goin' right now to git de key," exclaimed Patsy, hurriedly wiping her hands on her apron, untying that garment, and throwing it in a corner.

"Yes, Patsy, be quick before she is done playing," cried Hazard.

He looked after her impatiently. He beat a tattoo with his restless fingers until he heard her returning step in the hall. He rushed to the door and smiled triumphantly, as he saw the key held out in her hand. She motioned to him and he followed her quickly and noiselessly. Up the stairs from the ground-floor, up again into the story above, along the corridor, and through the outer chamber to the door of that inner sanctuary into which, thought Hazard, the Sphinx withdraws to undergo her transformation.

Patsy unlocked the door and Hazard stepped quickly in. He gave a hurried glance around the room, noting its neat-



ness and elegance. The tall mirrors reflected his white face and burning eyes.

“There is a closet?” he said.

“There’s two on um,” returned Patsy in a whisper. “Git into dat furdest one and hide yourself ’mongst de clothes what’s hangin’ up.”

He lost not a second in doing as she directed. The closet was not locked. It had garments hanging thickly against the wall. He could hide among these if need be.

Patsy went out and locked the chamber-door. Not an instant too soon, for the music in the parlor below stopped suddenly, and presently Hazard heard a light step just outside the door.

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## CHAPTER XLVI.

THE key turned in the lock; the door opened, the Sphinx entered and closed the door behind her. She wore a black silk gown, the loose corsage bound at the waist by a cord. The short gray gauze veil which she always wore in-doors hung over her face, fastened to a black jet band worn across the crown of her gray, nearly white head.

She came in with a languid step and stopped an instant, leaning heavily against a corner of the dressing-case. Then she turned and faced the mirror. Her back was now to Hazard, but he could see her full reflection in the tall clear glass. How ugly, how old, how grotesque her face was, how queer her hump-shouldered figure! No; that could never be the woman he sought; Laura Montcalm could never be made up to look like that. She took off the veil with its jet head-dress, and resting her hands on the marble slab, looked at her hideous image—the large hooked nose, the purple mark, the furrowed cheeks.

A strange, sad, self-mocking smile flitted over her face. She took off the pale-blue spectacles. Ah, here was something of a change. The eyes were certainly not ugly—they



were beautiful—large, darkly blue, and bright. But they shone under a bushy penthouse of gray brows. And still Hazard shook his head.

Once more the lady raised her arm. The full black sleeve hid her face an instant; when Hazard saw it next his heart gave a quick bound. Here *was* a change. The great, grotesque nose was gone. In its place was a delicately shaped feature, certainly resembling that of Laura Montcalm as shown in her picture, lying now against Hazard's throbbing heart.

But still there was the red mark, the white hair, the bushy gray eyebrows, the wrinkles in cheeks and forehead. These were there when she moved away from the mirror. She went in the direction of the small dressing and bath-room into which Hazard had looked when he took his survey of the chamber. This room was not within his now limited range of sight, but he heard the door open and knew she had gone inside. Presently he heard the plash of water.

"She is taking a bath," he said. "May she come forth fresh as Venus from the Egean."

He took the picture of Laura Montcalm from his bosom and held it in his hand ready to compare the faces. He heard the door open; he gave one glance at the lovely face of the miniature; then looked up as a light step gave token that the mysterious lady was crossing the room. He came near uttering a wild exclamation of delight. There stood before him the living original of the picture he held in his hand. No longer the deformed and disfigured Miss Faust—but Laura Montcalm—the beautiful—the impersonation of grace.

She wore a dressing-gown of creamy-white muslin, just outlining her lovely shape, her skin was glowing from the bath, her bright hair hung in damp half-curls over her shoulders, and little wet rings lay against her pearly brow. Her little white stockingless feet were thrust into black



velvet slippers. In one hand she held the gray wig she had worn. She put it on the dressing-case beside the false nose, the spectacles and the veil. Where was the great red mark? It had probably been a sort of gluey, colored plaster easily washed off. She looked at the instruments of disguise, lying there in a little queer heap with that same curious, sad, sardonic smile; then she turned to the mirror and once again Hazard saw a form and face reflected in the tall glass, but how different from the other. He could hardly believe such a transformation possible, for all he had some knowledge of stage dressing-rooms and the mysteries of "making up."

As the lady contemplated the fair image in the mirror, a gleam of pleasure touched her mouth and eyes. It faded quickly. Her face darkened. She lifted her arms and put her clasped hands on the top of her head, as though to crush down some memory that maddened.

"What does it matter. Oh, what does it matter?"

It was almost a wail. Hazard understood it to mean: "What does it matter that I am fair? Love is no more for me; nor hope, nor any pleasure or prospect in life."

She walked to the cage of the canary and chirruped to the bird. It had fluttered away from her when she first came in, and sat now, a moody bunch of feathers, on its perch.

It turned its head, saw her, and flew toward her, uttering a joyous chirp.

"Ah! you know me now?" she murmured, as she pressed her face to the gilded bars and kissed the delighted bird. "To think that *you* are the only creature I can be my true self before—you and he."

She sighed heavily and turned from the cage, walking the floor a moment, with her hands again pressed on her head as though to crush down some painful thought. As she passed back and forth, Hazard had glimpses of her



white face, her shining hair, her trailing robe. Once he could have put out his hand and touched the shell-like foot in its velvet casing.

Presently he saw her take a book from the table and turn toward the bed. He could not see her, but he knew she had lain down. He heard the slight rustle and the faint creak, as she sunk on the silken coverlid and soft pillows of the bed.

Minute after minute went by. He could hear her occasionally turn the leaves of her book. Once he heard her sigh. He had found a banished foot-stool in the closet, and he softly raised himself from his crouching position and seated himself on the foot-stool, leaning his head back against a soft silken mass that had a faint odor of jasmine. The softness and perfume affected his impressionable senses. They were *her* clothes he felt sure. Perhaps that graceful blue robe he had seen her wear when her lover came to visit his bird in her gilded cage. Curse Heathcliff! How came that old grenadier of a man to win the love of two beautiful women? Well, it should not do him any good. He would never possess the one, nor should he longer enjoy the other.

“To-night his star shall set,” said the passionate boy, to himself. “I told him we would have our Philippi.”

The leaves of the book had ceased to be turned. Hazard lifted his head from its silken-soft resting-place and listened. He could catch the sound of soft, regular breathing. The lady of the Enchanted Castle was asleep.

He opened the door of the closet and crept softly out. Noiselessly he stole to the side of the bed. He stood close to it, and looked at its sleeping occupant.

Was *this* the face of a murderess?

A nobly, delicately molded face with an unutterable pathos about the mouth and in the closed veined lids and the pale blue shadows under the long lashes. There was sadness and the trace of repressed suffering; there was a



touch of pride and defiance in that face, but of crime there was not a sign.

And how fair she was; with just that mellowing molding touch of time and thought which gives beauty its ripe charm.

One curling lock lay across the white swell of her bosom. Hazard lifted it lightly and thought of his sharp journalist little scissors in his pocket, but refrained from the temptation.

But when he noted the rose-tinged snow of the round arm lying across the pillow, he impulsively bent down and pressed his smooth lips (the blonde mustache was in his pocket) to the cool soft skin.

She gave a little start; a tremor ran over her; but her eyes did not uncloze. Hazard drew back and watched her.

“A Judas kiss, my sweet,” he said to himself. “Did your inner sense warn you of it? I shall betray you before the cock crows, despite all this appealing beauty. If I were a knight of ye olden time I might champion your cause. I might keep your secret and help you to escape. But chivalry is a played game. I am a product of the nineteenth century. Love and chivalry count for something in the life of to-day, perhaps, but not for much. Money, power, luxury, leave them limping behind. By trying to save you, my beautiful Laura, I should get myself into a scrape. By betraying you, I shall get seven thousand dollars in cash and a strong hold upon the favor of a prospective governor, to say nothing of the chance to crush an opponent and a rival. The odds are against you, Laura, though I own I hate to think of that white wrist wearing the iron bracelet. One more kiss.”

Once more he bent and pressed his daring lips upon the sleeper's soft white arm. She stirred again, and he drew back for a second, a little frightened. Presently he began to fan her slowly and softly with a fan of white feathers he



had picked up from the floor. In a little while the frown passed from her forehead and her features settled with the quiet restfulness of sleep.

As he plied the fan he had been thinking: "How shall I get out of here? To slip into the dressing-room, get the key out of the pocket of her black silk gown and unlock the door will be probably to waken her. Even if I succeed in getting out without disturbing her, she will know by the unfastened door that she has been spied upon and her secret discovered. She will make inquiries and find out from old Caleb, and I shall have alarmed my game before I am *quite* ready to bring it down. I'll see if some other plan is not feasible."

He remembered the great trees that grew close to the house at the back. The door which opened into the secret boudoir was slightly ajar. He stepped lightly across the chamber and entered this pretty little sitting-room in which he had first seen the Sphinx from his post of observation at the upper window of the old house. Here was the window which had framed the picture of her in the blue dress. He looked through the turned slats of the venetian blind. There were no limbs or trees near enough to this window to be available as a means of descent. It was the other window which had been so hidden by foliage he could never see into it. He went up to this window and made the discovery that a limb of the large sycamore stretched before it almost within arm's-length. He might grasp this and swing himself down to another stouter limb below it, and thence it would be easy to reach the ground.

He softly opened the shutters, got into the window, succeeded in grasping the limb, and in a few minutes had leaped to the soft tufted ground as lightly as his prototype—the jaguar. His wide satchel, containing the folded ladder, was safe by its strap around his neck, and he was safe on the other side of the Red House wall before its mistress had ended her fateful siesta.



He walked to the office of "The Rattler" as though he trod on air. Rosy visions danced before his eyes. Heathcliff unmasked—a little fortune in his pocket; the promise of a lucrative appointment, and in the dimmer perspective—Honor Montcalm as his bride. These were the mirages that made his dark cheeks glow as he walked swiftly along the sunny pavement.

To-night at the torch-light meeting he would make his grand *coup*.

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## CHAPTER XLVII.

THE night was still and starlit. There was no moon. Had there been its white radiance would have paled in the red glare of the torches that lit the large central square of Wallport.

The square was surging with people, white and black, men and boys, with a sprinkling of women. And near the tall monumental shaft that rose in the center of the square there was a number of carriages containing ladies and their escorts. Near to the monument the speaker's stand had been erected. Behind it floated a flag bearing the symbols of the state; on either side of it flared immense red torches on tall, narrow stands. A band of musicians, seated on the granite pedestal of the monument, played lively airs on their glittering instruments, while the people gathered.

When the city clock had struck eight the crowd began to shout and huzza for their different candidates. A bluff-looking man in gray mounted the stand and made a speech in eulogy of Norton. That trained and wily politician was then called for, and made a witty little speech of five minutes. He seemed disposed to speak longer, but there were shouts in the crowd for Heathcliff. It was known that the occasion was his; the meeting had been gotten up



chiefly by his friends, and since his losses by the fire, the tide of sympathy had run strongly in his favor.

“Heathcliff! Heathcliff!” roared the crowd, and the Mayor of Wallport ascended the rostrum. He was very pale; his arm was still in a sling, and a red scar branded his forehead, showing where it had come in contact with a burning beam. But his manner was as quiet and self-controlled as ever, and his voice, as it went out over the throng, had that deep, weighty utterance, that commands silence and inspires trust. He briefly explained his views upon the question of labor and capital—views which had been so grossly misrepresented.

His setting forth of the respective rights of employer and laborer was impartial and dispassionate; and so forcible and simple that the most obtuse could not fail to understand. He said he had never before spoken in public of himself. There had seemed no need. Nearly half of his life—all its best years—had been spent among them a mere youth—poor, unknown, with but one friend in the city—his mother. There had been some years of struggle; then he had become able to buy a small interest in the machine shop, which he afterward owned. He saved money and bought real estate, which he sold when it increased in value. Gradually he had engaged in enterprises requiring him to employ a number of hands. Many of these men were present. If any one of them could say that he or any one known to him had not received fair wages for fair work let him speak. If any one could say that he had been wronged or mistreated, or discharged unless for persistent misconduct or neglect of work, let him speak. If any one who had ever been in his employ could say that he had been ill or in distress and had let his wants be known without receiving assistance, let him speak.

To the pause that followed there was silence. No voice was raised in contra-assertion.

Heathcliff resumed. He said that in dealing fairly,



justly and humanely by his employés, a man did only what plain duty required of him. He deserved no credit for it, and it was foolish egotism to speak of it unless forced to do so by being misrepresented.

At this point, Honor Montcalm threw back the lace veil she had worn and listened with an agitation she could hardly control. She sat with her friend Mrs. Blair in a close carriage drawn up in the shadow of a tree. Colonel Blair, who had come with them, had got out of the carriage to speak to friends in the crowd. Honor had come expecting, yet dreading to hear Heathcliff denounce the underhand methods which certain unscrupulous spirits had used in conducting the campaign on her father's side. She trembled lest she should hear that father's high name publicly lowered by being connected with these dishonest methods. Since the burning of his factory there had been a strong reaction among the masses in Heathcliff's favor. It was felt that he had been wronged. The scales had fallen from the eyes of many who had been blinded by the specious representations of young Hall and his confrères. There was a suppressed feeling that injustice had been done to a man to whom the city and the state at large owed much, and it needed but a touch of inflammatory eloquence from Heathcliff to make this burst out in open indignation.

But no such touch came from Heathcliff, and Honor drew a deep breath of relief as she listened, while her heart beat with admiration of the man who forbore to use the means of retaliation which were ready to his hand. Did he forbear for her sake? Honor thought not so. The motive which might have endeared him to some women would have detracted from him in the eyes of this woman who put honor above love. It was the magnanimity of the man, she said to herself, which made him forbear to expose one who, though now an opponent, had once been a friend.



Heathcliff did not allude to the charge which had been flaunted by "The Rattler" that he had turned off a number of his factory hands because he believed they would not vote for him. He refuted the charge, however, by showing plainly the necessity which had caused him to restrict operations at his mills during this almost panic summer. Other factories in this and neighboring states had closed doors for months. He showed by figures that he had run his mills at a loss to himself. When it became necessary to reduce the number of hands, it had not been done by drawing lots as some of the men had wished, because this had not appeared to him perfectly fair. It seemed better to dismiss those who were best able to do without the money their work at the mills might bring. He had made strict inquiry into the circumstances of the hands before he had dismissed any.

When he spoke of the burning of the factory it was only to regret it, less as a loss of property than as a loss of what had been pride and an object of keen interest to him and, as he believed, of profit and pride to the city. It was gone. The place where it had stood was now a blank vacancy—a blot upon the city's prosperity. But it should not remain long so. The building, as was well known, had been hardly half covered by insurance. Its loss had crippled him severely, but it had not wholly disabled him. ("The Rattler" had declared him on the brink of bankruptcy.) Friendly capitalists had stretched out their hands to him, and the factory would be rebuilt. Work would soon be begun upon it.

Applause and cries of "When? When?" rang throughout the crowd.

"Not next month, nor next week," he answered. "To-morrow at sunrise the first blows will be struck toward rebuilding the destroyed factory. In a very few months the whir of busy wheels will again be heard in Factory Row."



Deafening shouts of applause went up from the crowd. Heathcliff's factory had been the pride of the city. Its destruction had been a state loss; the announcement that it would be rebuilt and by its former owner, whom all feared was hopelessly disabled in business, was a cause for public gratulation. What he promised all knew would be performed. The applause continued after he left the stand, and when a sturdy, plainly dressed man appeared on the platform and it was understood that he was an advocate of Heathcliff, he was greeted with cheers. He was recognized as a master machinist, once a citizen of Wallport, but now living in an adjoining state—a worthy and reliable man. He said he had never spoken in public before in his life, but he had seen the tricks employed by the opposition to injure Heathcliff, and he wanted to add his testimony to what the mayor had been obliged to say in his vindication. He was not now in Heathcliff's employ, but for ten years he had worked in his machine-shop, and never once, he could honestly say, had he been treated other than squarely. Once the boss had spoken to him in a quick harsh way, but he came and apologized for it as man to man. Once, he had been discharged, but it was for drunkenness. It was in the days when he had loved whisky too well. In the sickly summer of '75, when his family were down with fever, Heathcliff had visited and helped them as he had the sick folks in Factory Row this summer where the dengue was so bad. He had done one thing that showed the man more than any other act. "It came to my ears," said the machinist, "by accident. It's known to most of you that the man who is now in jail for firing Heathcliff's mill, as a good many more ought to be, had been discharged from his employ for repeated misconduct, and that he made his wife quit out of spite, and made it his business to abuse Heathcliff at every street corner; but it is not known except to some few folks at the Row that the mayor has supported this man's family all the summer, and every bit of



bread they had put in their mouth, every shoe they had put on their feet came from him. Write that down on the credit side of the man you try to call a heartless money-grinder," said the old machinist as he put his hat on his head and turned to go. "There's lot of things like it I could tell you, but I have said enough."

"No, no, go on," shouted the crowd. "Heathcliff! Hurrah for Heathcliff! Go on."

But another figure had appeared on the stand—a lithe, youthful figure—a dark palely glowing face, eyes that flashed half-mockingly over the crowd. It was the first time the dashing boy speaker had ever failed to be greeted with applause when he appeared, but now there were no cheers. He was known to be the bitterest nounder of Heathcliff. "The Rattler" had every morning been filled with his venomous attacks. And Heathcliff just now was upborne on the fickle wave of popular favor. There were a few hisses and loud cries of "Down, Hall; go on, old man. Heathcliff forever!"

He threw up his handsome head defiantly. There came a second's pause; then, high and clear, with its daring, mocking note, rang the bugle voice of the boy:

"I shall speak about Heathcliff. It is why I am here."

The old man stepped down. The young Alcibiades threw back his curls with a toss of his handsome head and looked over the expectant crowd:

"I come to speak of Heathcliff," he said, "but—I come to bury your Cæsar, not to praise him. I come to bury him in a sepulcher of infamy from which there is no resurrection! Never shall he wear the crown of state—he, the hypocrite, the poltroon, the criminal!"

The word cut sharp and clear through the silence. A shock ran over the crowd: then hisses and cries of "Liar, slanderer!" filled the air. But again rang the bugle voice:

"I come prepared to prove the charge I make! I hurl it in the teeth of the arch-hypocrite standing there, and he



dare not deny it! Fellow-citizens, under the whitest of sheep-skins there has walked the blackest of wolves amongst you—a man who under the guise of high morality, the model official, the patriotic citizen, the spotless, the pattern Christian—has outraged the laws of morality and the laws of his land. Listen, and you shall hear:

“Two years ago this city was thrown into commotion by the murder of one of her best citizens, Captain Montcalm, a brave ex-soldier, and the brother of our gallant general, was stabbed in his own home by the hand of his wife. The woman disappeared. She packed her jewels and other valuables, she stepped across the pool of her husband’s blood, into the night and the streets of Wallport, and there she disappeared as utterly as though the earth had opened and swallowed her. In vain the city was searched from end to end; the trains, the outbound vessels. In vain the telegraph-wires flashed the woman’s crime and the description of her person across the continent. In vain rewards were offered and trained detectives put upon the scent; Laura Montcalm was not found. It has come to be believed that she drowned herself on the night of the murder. But she did not drown herself. She did not leave the city. She has remained here cunningly hidden by her lover—a man whom no one dared to suspect. She remained here, harbored as his mistress, by an arch-hypocrite—the chief official of the city, bound by his oath of office to protect that city’s interests. Ay! Laura Montcalm—the husband-slayer—has, for two years, been harbored in this city by his honor, the Mayor of Wallport.”

Had a bolt of deafening thunder fell from the starlighted sky it could not have more startled and electrified the people. For a moment, a silence as of the death-chamber fell upon the assembly. The murmurs rose and swelled: voices began to vociferate:

“False! Slander! Prove it! Where is your proof? Your proof!”



Hazard made a step forward and pointed to Heathcliff.

“Proof?” he cried. “There it is! There, in that white face; there, in those blanched lips; there, in those guilty eyes! Look at the man! What other proof is needed? But you shall have other proof. Do you see your sheriff yonder? He has just arrested and placed under guard, as his prisoner, Laura Montcalm, the murderess! She sits at this moment with the irons on her white wrists, stripped of the disguise in which she has eluded justice. For this model mayor and would-be governor has not only been accessory to capital crime by harboring a criminal, but he has been guilty of fraud in stealing the personality of a woman who died two years since in a foreign land, and in it wrapping the criminal he wished to hide from justice. In this disguise she has sat by his side in your theater; by his side in his carriage as it rolled through your streets. Fellow-citizens, the daring imposition is scarcely credible, but it is true! For two years Laura Montcalm has lived among you as Miss Faust—the deformed woman of the Red House!”

The last charm had been cast into the caldron. Commotion and wild confusion ensued. The crowd surged like the waves of a storm-lashed ocean. Opposing utterances clashed against each other. There were a few shouts for Heathcliff—a few cries of “A lie! A hatched-up campaign lie!” But these were drowned in hisses and vociferations of “Hypocrite!” “Villain!” “Down with him!” “Away with him to jail!” “Confess it or deny it!” “Make him deny it or own it!” “Up with you, and own it, or prove it a lie!”

But when, at length, the mayor’s well known form arose, not upon the speaker’s stand, but upon the steps of the monument, a hush fell upon the assembly.

He was pale as the background of granite stone against which he stood. The burned scar across his face showed



lurid purple in the torch-light. Twice he essayed to speak but strong emotion choked his utterance. At length he conquered it. Strong and full, but with a vibrating tremor of feeling rang his voice:

“Fellow-citizens, what you have heard is true! I have concealed Laura Montcalm for two years from the pursuing law which had such overwhelming evidence against her. I did it for two reasons. First—Laura Montcalm is innocent of murder—as innocent as the whitest-souled child. Secondly—the claim of nature—of kindred blood—demanded that I should protect her. Laura Montcalm is my sister.”

A loud, clear laugh of derision—Hazard’s laugh—was the comment.

“Oh, white innocence! Oh, new-found relationship,” cried his mocking voice. “Innocence that we are asked to believe in the face of the most damning facts. Relationship that nobody ever heard of in all these years! Oh! most romantic! Had she a strawberry mark upon her arm, my honorable mayor? Too thin, your excellency. We are not all fools, my good Sunday-school superintendent.”

“Too thin!” echoed the crowd. “We are not such fools as to accept your word for it!”

The strongly excited crowd surged toward the monument. In the lead were a dozen roughs, half drunk and reckless. Their controlling instinct was to pull down all that was above them. They saw now a chance to strike one who seemed down—the under dog in the fight, and they hastened to obey this savage instinct, yelling, “Down with him!” “The Sunday-school hypocrite!” “The goody-good villain!” “The people’s oppressor.” “The greedy monopolist!” “Down with him!”

They gathered ferocity as they yelled and pushed. Their blood-shot eyes darted venomous determination. The police seemed cowed. The few who appeared on the scene



appeared powerless to assert their authority over that fierce, drunken crew, armed with sticks and stones.

On they pressed to the monument, Heathcliff stood there—his agitation (which had not been for himself) wholly subdued; his form erect, his face pale yet masterful.

They flung themselves against him. He parried one blow and then another with his light walking-cane, wielded by his one sound arm. A red-faced giant raised his heavy bludgeon with what seemed murderous intent, but a voice—a woman's voice—arrested the blow. He stopped and stared in stupid wonder in the direction whence the voice came.

In that direction there had been a counter stir. The crowd had fallen back in confusion. A pair of strong, black horses, urged by furious lashing at the driver's hands, broke a passage through the throng. They were reined up beside the monument. The door of the carriage to which they were attached burst open, and a woman stood on the step—tall, white-clad, death-pale.

“Cowards!” cried her high, sustained voice. “A score of you falling upon one disabled man! Citizens, will you permit a fellow-man to be killed before your eyes in this way?”

As she spoke, a stone hurled by some reckless hand struck the mayor on the forehead. The blood spurted; the man staggered back against the stone pillar.

Again the girl's voice rang out, with a thrill of anguish sounding through it. “Here! For God's sake, bring him here. My purse, a purse of gold to those who will bring him here.”

Even in that moment of excited brute-instinct, the word gold was a charm. Strong arms seized Ira Heathcliff and bore his half-insensible form to the carriage. He was placed on the seat; the black horses once more forced their way through the crowd, while Hazard Hall uttered a fierce oath.



“By all the devils!” he cried. “It is Honor Montcalm. She has compromised herself forever.”

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

“To Mayor Heathcliff’s house,” Honor cried to the driver, and once more the black horses forced a passage through the crowd.

“Oh, Honor, Honor,” whimpered Mrs. Blair, “what will people say? what will your father say? Such a bad man—your poor uncle’s murderer too!”

Honor did not heed—scarcely heard her. She had put her own cloak under Heathcliff’s head. She bent over him, wiped the blood from his forehead, and bathed his face with the contents of Mrs. Blair’s vinaigrette. He was only stunned. He soon opened his eyes, he saw her face bending over him and a smile touched his lips.

“You live! thank Heaven, you live,” she uttered in low, joyous accents.

His face darkened with a passionate despair.

“I live; it would be better not so,” he said.

“Ah, do not say that!”

“Why should I not? Defamed; my sister in prison; *you* lost to me! Why should I live?”

She took up his hand and laid it against her cheek.

“Courage,” she whispered, “for my sake.”

He turned his lighted eyes upon her.

“Honor, can you, do you believe in me?”

“With all my soul.”

He raised himself from his drooping posture. He pushed the blood-stained hair from his brow and his eyes sought hers.

“I will live,” he said, “I will conquer! I will prove her innocence and mine. It is a hard task, but it shall be accomplished.”



“Would I might help you,” she said, earnestly.

“You do help me unspeakably, my beloved. You give me belief, sympathy, and this is hope and life to me. I thank you, dearest, for your belief in the possibility of my sister’s innocence. She is innocent. I saw it in her face the instant I told her that her husband had been killed. I saw that she knew nothing of it till then. She had come to me that night and said: ‘You are my brother. I have just read it in my dead father’s writing. I have come to you because I am miserable. Let me stay with you, I have no other home.’ Until that moment I had not known she was my sister. I had never heard her maiden name; my own name was unfamiliar to her. I read the letter she gave me—written by her father and mine. He had been separated from his first wife—my mother. The union was uncongenial. She returned to her father with her child, and took back her family name. He removed to another state, and, after some years, married again. His wife died when their child Laura was an infant. His daughter never heard him speak of his first marriage. She was away from him when he died. When he felt he must leave her alone, he told his confidential clerk of his former marriage, and the existence of his son. He confided to this man—David Holt—a letter for his daughter, but to be given to her only in the event that she needed a brother’s protection. Laura returned from Europe the wife of Captain Montcalm. They came here, and the faithful Holt accompanied them. When she went to Aphrodite Island that fatal day, he followed her to watch over her, and give her her father’s letter. He thought the time had come when she needed a brother’s protection. He put the letter into her hand as she was entering her husband’s house and begged her to read it at once. Captain Montcalm stood in the door of his study and stopped her as she was going to her room. He was excited with anger and wine. He was abusive, violent. Once he seemed about to strike her, and she snatched



the little jewel-hilted dagger from her belt. He struck it from out of her hand, and she turned and fled from him and locked herself in her room. She never saw him again. She read our father's letter, hastily collected her jewels and came to me. Half an hour later I was summoned to the scene of the murder. I realized that the evidence against her would be fatal, and I determined to conceal her until I could get her out of the country. The next day came a letter telling me that Miss Faust had died in Germany. The thought flashed on me that I might save my sister by disguising her as the recluse of the Red House. The next day the city papers announced the return of Miss Faust. You know the rest. You know that she was seen without the disguise, and the house was searched. Little Kildee saved her then—an act of voluntary self-sacrifice. It only postponed what was inevitable. They have hunted her down at last. She, the delicate, proud, innocent woman occupies a criminal's cell to-night; and there is not one human being who does not think this horrible fate is just. There is none to believe her innocent."

"I believe it," Honor said,

"You? Ah, my beloved, I thank you. You are more than woman in your self-forgetful pity. You have stood by me when others deserted me. It will always be a precious remembrance. But you must do so no more. You must not bring down loss of friends and blame upon yourself for me. The thought that you have faith in me is as life to my soul; but you must give no more outward signs of kindness to me. I can claim none—not until I have cleared my name and hers from this stain. If I can not do this—then I must be content to think what you might have been to me. I could not ask you to cross the gulf Fate has dug between us; and yet—"

He stopped and looked at her—a look full of wistful anguish. She did not speak; her eyes met his and he understood. He felt that in the alternative he had spoken



of there would be no hope. She could not incur the undying anger of the father she loved by giving her hand to a man he believed to have been accessory to his brother's murder.

Mrs. Blair touched Honor with a trembling hand.

"We are at Mr. Heathcliff's house," she said. "The carriage has stopped, and so has a cab that has been following us. I think it is the general getting out. Dear me, we shall have a scene!"

Heathcliff rose at once, but with some difficulty, for his brain was yet reeling. He alighted from the carriage without assistance. Standing beside it an instant, he thanked Mrs. Blair, and clasped the hand that Honor held out to him. He clung to it as a drowning man might cling to a hand held out to save him. Neither saw the white wrathful face of General Montcalm until their hands were stricken apart, and Honor, turning, saw her father, saw him raise a heavy stick which would have descended upon Heathcliff had she not seized it and held it with all her strength.

"Go," she said to Heathcliff. "Go, if you love me."

He bent his head and turned into his own gate.

"Is this my father who has so lost control over himself?" Honor said as she loosed her grasp upon the stick.

"Is this my daughter who has forgotten her woman's modesty in her bold efforts to shield a felon?" he answered, his eyes flashing sternly upon her.

"I have not forgotten my womanhood. I have only obeyed its promptings in trying to save from cowardly massacre a man who saved my life—a man I believe to be innocent."

"You mean then to defy me? You mean to cast yourself out from my respect and the respect of every friend you possess, by clinging to that man?"

"I shall not defy or disobey you, my father. I could not help doing what I have done to-night. I do not repent



it, but I will not repeat it. I will not do anything like it again. Whatever I may feel toward Mr. Heathcliff, I shall remember my duty to you.”

She spoke coldly, mechanically, but her father was satisfied. He knew he could trust her to keep her word.

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## CHAPTER XLIX.

FOR nearly three days the case of the state against Laura Montcalm for the murder of her husband, had been before the criminal court of Wallport. The trial might have been put off until the next session of court, but such was not the wish of the prisoner. Her earnest request to her counsel was that the case should be brought forward at once. The prison life was more than she could bear.

“Better death—better any death,” she said to her brother in the one interview they were granted. “This,” looking around at her grated cell with a shudder; “this is the torture of the Inquisition. It will bring worse than death. I shall go mad.”

So, at the next meeting of the Superior Court—four weeks after her arrest—Laura Montcalm’s trial came before the judge, the jury and the people who filled the large court-room—an interested and excited throng.

During that four weeks’ interregnum, Heathcliff’s efforts in his sister’s behalf had been unremitting. He had withdrawn at once from the political contest; he had given bond for his own appearance on a charge of complicity in crime, and he had devoted his time, energies and money to employing every means to save the prisoner from the fate that seemed inevitable. He engaged the best criminal lawyers of the State. He studied the case with them, and followed out every encouraging idea they were able to suggest, or that occurred to his own anxious, unresting mind. But with no hopeful result. The lawyers shook their heads, and declared that the case looked darker the more it was



studied. But to postpone the trial seemed to promise nothing. They could only rest their case on the uncertainty of circumstantial evidence; yet it was plain to every one that there were instances where circumstantial evidence was stronger than the testimony of eye-witnesses; and this seemed such an instance.

On this third day of the trial, the court had adjourned until the afternoon. The trial was nearly at an end. The evidence, *pro* and *con*, would be summed up by the chief attorney for the State and for the prisoner, and the case submitted to the jury. The result did not admit of a doubt. Laura Montcalm's lawyers had been unable to bring forward a single circumstance to shake the impression of her guilt.

Judge Adam Collier—the well-known eccentric criminal lawyer, chief counsel for the defense—had left the courtroom at eleven o'clock and gone down to the depot. He had telegraphed his wife to send him a certain French legal work he wished to refer to, and he was looking for it to arrive on the eleven o'clock train. He received the volume from the hands of a friend, who asked at once:

“Well, judge, how does the Montcalm case come on? We think down our way you've got a hard nut this time.”

“We can't tell yet,” was the answer. “It hasn't gone to the jury, and something may turn up at the eleventh hour.”

“Excuse me; are you the counsel for Mrs. Montcalm?”

“Yes,” he answered, looking inquiringly at the tall, pale, gray-haired, peculiar-looking person who stood before him in a traveling rig, accompanied by another man, young, fair-haired and with a pleasant, half-foreign face.

“Then I have something to communicate to you—something that has an important bearing on the case.”

“Ah,” said the lawyer, his face brightening. “Come with me to my room at the Sharon House. I will hear what you have to say with pleasure.”



The three left the depot together, entered the hotel across the street, and were soon shut within Judge Collier's comfortable room. Seated here, the sallow-gray but not old-looking man began to talk, and the lawyer to listen with increasing interest, taking notes rapidly in the short-hand peculiar to himself. At the end of an hour he rose: he shook hands with the singular-looking man; his gray deep-set eyes had an unwonted twinkle. He rang the bell and ordered "brandy cocktails for three." Then he sent a telephone message to Heathcliff requesting him to come at once to the hotel.

Two hours later when the court opened its afternoon sitting the great room was as full of people as a theater on the first night of a favorite star's reappearance. Conspicuous among the assembly were the leonine head and massive figure of General Montcalm. He had occupied that seat—near the bar—all through the trial. He had not missed a syllable that had been said. He had sat there, a stern-eyed, relentless Nemesis, it seemed to the pale prisoner. Once only she had met his eye. Its cruel lightning seemed as though it meant to blast her. Honor had not been in the court-room before; but she was present now, wearing a veil of thick lace, and plainly dressed. She could not force herself to stay away. Her anxiety was too absorbing, her hunger for a sight of the face of him she loved and had not seen for weary weeks; her desire to show him by some look or token that her sympathy was still strong and her faith in him unshaken.

Hazard Hall was in his usual place near the front where he took notes in short-hand for "The Rattler." His manner was nervous and excited, his face haggard and changed.

One would fancy that he, who was so ambitious of success, would feel elated at the way things had gone. By ferreting out the criminal in a case that had baffled trained detectives, he had at once achieved *éclat*, crushed a political enemy and rival, strengthened the favor of a powerful



patron, and won a large money reward which would be his as soon as Laura Montcalm was pronounced guilty.

Yet he did not look like a victor. Truth to tell, he was haunted, day and night, by the face of the prisoner at the bar. It had come up before him persistently ever since he had seen her lying asleep in her white nest, with that look on her fair face which spoke of tears, of wounded pride, but did not speak of guilt. He had thought of her—the delicate refined woman—in her prison cell with a pang of remorse. He had gone to the jail to see her, but she had refused him an interview. He had sent her flowers many times, stipulating that she should not be told who was the donor. During the trial, her face had fascinated him so he could hardly keep his eyes from it. “So proud, so pure,” he said to himself. “She can not be guilty. And it is I who brought this doom upon her. But for me, it would never have fallen. Her disguise would never have been penetrated. How she must hate me!”

He shook off the feeling manfully. He who boasted that he was an exponent of the nineteenth century spirit must not give way to the weakness of sentiment. He scorned sentiment. He said to himself that his suit for Honor Montcalm was prompted by ambition, policy—perhaps passion. The spirit of the age allowed passion, only it must obey the check-rein of policy.

He was particularly nervous this afternoon. He twirled the pencil in his slender fingers; he looked out over the crowd and stole frequent furtive glances at the prisoner. In a few hours her fate would be pronounced. She must know that it would be death, or life-long imprisonment. How could she sit so like a statue of marble? And where was Heathcliff—her alleged brother, as “The Rattler” was wont to style him? Why was he not beside her as he had been always during the trial? Surely at this hour she needed the support of his presence more than ever before.

She did need the support of his presence. She could



not conjecture why he did not come. She sat the cynosure of all those eyes. She felt them on her face. She had not worn a veil through all the trial. She would not cover her face as though guilt were stamped upon it. But now she longed for some sort of screen to interpose between her face and all those eyes—more than all those stern, pitiless eyes of that haughty, lion-faced old man—her dead husband's brother. The black dress made the whiteness of her delicate, high-bred face almost startling. By what mighty effort it kept its proud, gentle composure was known only to the tensely strung brain and heart within. She sat looking down at the cluster of tea-roses and the note in Heathcliff's writing which had been handed her.

“Be of good cheer,” said the penciled lines, “there has been an unlooked-for interposition in our favor. I am not with you, but I am working for you.”

The words had made her heart flutter with a momentary hope, but it died out as the attorney for the prosecution went on with his closing speech. It was a summing-up of the evidence against her. Surely never was there so damning an array of circumstances. Her heart sunk lower and lower as she listened. She admitted to herself that it must seem impossible any hand but hers had struck the blow. The house was locked. There was no one in it but those two. It was known that she was at variance with her husband—that she had that day openly disobeyed and defied him. She had been seen, face to face, by two persons as she came out of the house by a back door muffled and disguised. Within they had found her husband dead, and in his breast the dagger she had worn all day in her belt. “Her flight was in itself a convincing proof of her guilt,” said the State's attorney, and as, pointing his long quivering forefinger at her face he called her “the Clytemnestra of the Nineteenth Century; the viper who had stung to death the generous heart that cherished it,” a half smile of bitter self-irony came to her lips, and she felt like bow-



ing her head in acknowledgment of the truth of the accusation. She felt that in all that assembly there was not one who doubted it.

A hum of voices filled the court-room as the State's attorney sat down. Laura Montcalm understood the import of that murmur. Indeed she caught a fragment of it—gallows, penitentiary for life.

“God grant it be the rope!” she said in her heart.

And then she suddenly felt herself grow insensible—callous to whatever might happen.

The jury's verdict, the judge's sentence, she felt indifferent to them. She lifted her head and saw beyond the cruel, staring eyes, the open window and the blue sky and white dream-like clouds of the Indian summer.

“And there is a God, and we are His children,” she said to herself, with that doubting, mocking half-smile touching her mouth.

She did not heed that her counsel had risen and was about to speak with his usual deliberation. She looked out at the blue sky and the white clouds, wondering vaguely why God had created beings to pass through this fever and delirium called life.

Something in her lawyer's voice—some new slight chord, made her look at him. His face was impassive as ever; the twinkle that had been in his gray eye three hours ago was now suppressed. There was nothing in his appearance to found a hope upon, but he was making an unexpected request. He was asking permission to bring forward a new witness for the defense—a witness who had arrived that day by the Northern train.

A spare man, with close-cut gray hair, a face worn and sallow, with strange sad eyes and a red triangular scar high up on his temple, came to the witness-stand. His manner was composed, yet a close observer might suspect that he was holding strong emotion in check. He lost control of himself for one second only. He took the witness's oath



with calmness, he looked over the faces of the jury, the judge, the lawyers, but when his eyes fell upon the prisoner he gave a perceptible start, a flush came into his thin cheek and he looked hurriedly away.

She, on her part, looked at him in a bewildered way as though recognition struggled with reason.

He began his statement. His name, he said, was David Hoffman Holt. He was known in this city where he had been for some years head clerk in the warehouses belonging to Captain Montcalm.

At this announcement Laura hardly refrained from uttering a cry. She had thought that this man—this true friend, was dead—others had thought so too. A murmur went through the crowd, and the State's attorney said:

“I beg pardon for interrupting the witness, but during the progress of this trial, it has been stated that David Holt, head clerk of Captain Montcalm, was imbecile—had been rendered so by an attack of brain-fever, had escaped from an asylum for persons of unsound mind and was thought to be dead, as nothing had been heard of him for many months.”

“Part of this statement is true,” the witness said, calmly, though his pallid face had flushed and the triangular scar on his temple turned purple. “A brain-fever did produce a temporary derangement of mind. I lost all recollection of past events except those of early childhood. I lost the power of speech in a great measure, and the faculty of reason. I was placed for treatment in an institute for the cure of brain and nerve diseases, from which I one day wandered away. Being considered harmless I was not under strict surveillance. I fell in with kind-hearted people, however, who cared for me. Six weeks ago, the pain in my head, which had troubled me at intervals, grew more severe and I was thrown into a high fever. I was then traveling with my friends. They stopped and sent for a physician. He was a skillful and noted surgeon. He



made an examination, and found that all my brain trouble had resulted from a blow on the head which had fractured the skull. The broken part pressing on the brain had caused the inflammation, the fever and the mental derangement and loss of recollection. He had had several similar cases, and had relieved two of these by the operation of trepanning the skull. He proposed to try this operation in my behalf, as it was the only hope of a cure. My friends consented. The fractured part of the skull was removed by the surgeon's saw, the bruised brain and membrane removed, and a silver plate fastened over the wound and the skin replaced. You can see the scar of the recently healed wound. After the fever had subsided, and I had slept for thirty hours without stirring, I woke restored to a healthy mental state. My thoughts were at first confused, but they soon grew clear and immediately spoke of the last vivid impression my mind had taken on—the killing of Captain Montcalm. My friends had not known my name or former associations, but they had chanced to read of the trial of Mrs. Montcalm for murder, and the supposed complicity of Mayor Heathcliff in the crime. I was told of it, and I hastened here the very hour my strength permitted, that I might save an innocent woman, and clear the name of a blameless man. I have the certificate of the physician who attended me, also his sworn deposition that I began to speak of the murder, and gave a statement (which I shall presently give you), as soon as my reason was restored. I have also with me one of the friends who nursed me in my illness, and who will corroborate my statement. As to my identity with David Holt, this cruel fever has turned me into a prematurely old man, with this gray hair and these sunken eyes, but surely I have acquaintances in this courtroom who recognize David Holt."

"Yes, yes, I know you." "I know you." "He's been through the furnace, but it's David Holt. I'll swear to him," cried several voices.



Order was called for, and the witness was told to resume his statement and tell what he knew of the murder. Shortened of the details elicited by cross-questioning and by the arbitrary requirements of legal formality, the story he told was this:

When he had brought Mrs. Montcalm back from the island, had given her her father's letter telling her that Ira Heathcliff was her brother, and had seen her enter her husband's house, he did not go away as she bade him. Anxiety on her account kept him standing on the portico. He knew of her husband's threats; he knew of his violent temper; he feared that in his mad fury he might attempt to injure her, and there was no one to protect her, not even a servant in the house. Presently he heard excited voices; he could refrain no longer from going in. He could do this, as Mrs. Montcalm had left the latch-key in the lock. He opened the door and went in. The voice he had heard was Captain Montcalm's and proceeded from the library at the further end of the hall. Before the door of the library he saw Mrs. Montcalm standing, white and defiant. Her husband stood just within the door. David could not see his form, only the menacing arm as he confronted his wife and denounced her in bitter, violent language. He was beside himself with rage and probably excited by wine. He seemed to threaten her with personal violence, for she drew back and took out of her belt a little jeweled dagger—an heir-loom in her family—which she had worn that day.

“Touch me at your peril,” he heard her say. Her husband struck the blade from her hand. She did not pick it up; she looked at him an instant—seeming to struggle for self-command, and then turned, darted past David Holt, as he stood against the wall, partly screened by a stand that held pots of geraniums, and fled upstairs. Captain Montcalm had started in pursuit, but he stopped (so near to David that he might have touched him), as he heard her shut and lock her door. He turned back toward his study,



his foot struck against the little dagger, and he picked it up, looked at it grimly, and laid it down on a shelf of a little cabinet that stood in the hall. As he was doing this a hand parted the curtain that hung before the door of the room opposite the library, and a woman came out—a dark, slender, handsome creature, who David at once knew must be the Mexican woman who had a claim upon Captain Montcalm. David had heard the story before, and this evening Laura had told him of the interview the woman had had with Captain Montcalm in the old cemetery. It was the revelation she had then overheard which had stung the wife into defiance of her husband's command.

The dark lady approached Captain Montcalm from behind, and put her hand on his arm.

“Well,” she said, “you did not keep your promise. You did not tell that woman you would discard her, as you swore to me you would if she disobeyed you.”

Captain Montcalm wheeled and glared at her, white with rage.

“What the devil are you doing here still? I thought you had left this house an hour ago.”

“I did not leave it,” she said, “I stayed to witness the interview with that woman, and to hear you discard her as you swore you would. I did not hear it. So you mean to make up with her, do you—false and cowardly that you are.”

“What is that to you? Leave me. It is enough to be driven wild by one's own wife, let alone—”

“Your own wife! This is what I have a right to be. I will not go away. I will stay here. To-morrow if you do not leave that woman I will tell her everything. I will proclaim you through the city.”

“Curse you, you Spanish fiend!” Captain Montcalm cried. He picked up an oblong slab of onyx from the cabinet shelf and menaced her with it. The gleam of the dagger caught her eye. She snatched it up and said something



sneeringly in Spanish. It seemed to madden him; he raised the slab with tensely drawn muscles, and the blow would have fallen on her head had not David rushed between them. The slab struck him on the temple and he reeled back stunned against the wall. But he had an instant of vivid consciousness in which he saw the blade in the hand of the Spanish woman bury itself in Montcalm's breast—saw him stagger back to the library door and heard her cry:

“Oh, my God! what have I done?”

He knew nothing more distinctly. He had a vague recollection of quitting the house and making his way with difficulty to his room in the warehouse, and of falling upon the bed. After that, all was blank.

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## CHAPTER L.

DAVID HOLT's testimony produced a decided revulsion of opinion in those who heard him. It impressed nearly every one with the feeling that it was true. His earnest tone, his straightforward delivery, the very look of his eye, were convincing. Then, there was his character as it was known to many in Wallport. A reserved but thoroughly reliable and honorable man—this was the reputation he had made for himself during the time he was Captain Montcalm's book-keeper. But there was no denying that the tale he told was a strange one. General Montcalm, who had leaned forward with his hands on his gold-headed cane—an eager listener, slowly shook his head. Hazard Hall was a creature of quick intuition. He felt that the story was true, and a tumult of mixed emotions was stirred up in his breast. Anger, disappointment, chagrin—these warred with a curious feeling of relief in the prospect that Laura Montcalm would not be convicted.

The surgeon's sworn deposition as to Holt's condition



previous to and after the operation of trepanning was produced. Max Rubin, being sworn, substantiated the circumstance (deposed to by the surgeon) that after waking from the long sleep which followed the operation, Holt began directly to speak of the killing of Captain Montcalm and to say that it was done by the Spanish woman.

The State's attorney began a searching cross-examination of David Holt. His object was to throw a doubt upon the veracity of the witness and insinuate an interested motive for his statement.

"You are, I believe, an intimate friend of the prisoner, Mr. Holt. You knew her before her marriage?"

"I have known her since she was a child. Her father partly raised me."

"Ah! one may say you are her foster-brother. It is natural it should be painful to you to see her in her present position—natural you should be willing to do *anything* to release her from it."

"I would do anything honorable, sir," David said steadily.

"Ahem, yes, anything honorable. You say the blow dealt you by Captain Montcalm stunned you: how was it that, being stunned, you were enabled to see the stab given by Madame Gonzalis?"

"The stab was given almost at the same instant that the blow descended upon my skull. I saw it as plainly as I see you—more plainly it seems to me, for I had, as I told you before, a second of vivid sensation like that experienced by drowning men, and by soldiers who are struck with a shot or shell in battle. The action of the senses seems intensified—there's a flash of exalted consciousness. This is not an uncommon experience."

"Is it also a common phenomenon that a person after having lost reason and memory from a fracture of the brain recovers his senses as suddenly as he lost them?"

"You have in that certificate the word of Doctor Knott,



an experienced physician, as to this. He tells you he has seen in the Paris hospitals a number of cases where reason was suddenly restored on the cause of derangement being removed—the pressure of the fractured part upon the brain.”

Then followed a string of ingeniously worded questions concerning the homicide. Holt accounted for the body being found inside the study by the reasonable supposition that Captain Montcalm had staggered back into the room either mechanically or with the instinctive intent to ring for help or to get water, and had fallen when just inside the room, striking against the door and closing it as he fell. Then Mme. Gonzalis had extinguished the gas and made her escape, leaving the hall in darkness. Laura Montcalm, when she came down-stairs on her way to seek her newly discovered brother, had walked down the dark passage and passed out, not dreaming that her husband was lying in his study dead, and that she had stepped in a pool of his warm blood. Such was his belief as to what had happened after his senses failed.

“They will not be able to convict Mrs. Montcalm, after this testimony, but she will not be fully cleared in the minds of the people. In Scotland the verdict would not be ‘not proven,’ ” whispered one old lawyer to another.

At this moment Mrs. Montcalm’s counsel arose, and quietly begged leave to introduce another witness. A moment before Heathcliff had entered and whispered something in his ear.

A new witness! Who could it be? What would he testify?

There was a stir, a buzz in the direction of the door. An invalid’s chair was seen being slowly pushed along the aisle. It was stopped in front of the judge—at the witness-stand. The chair contained the recumbent figure of a woman—a wasted figure; the fingers, nervously interlocked, were thin



and bloodless; the face was covered by a veil. She removed it when the chair came to a stand. The spectators pressed forward to see her. A thrill passed through them, so supernatural looked the large, black, burning eyes and emaciated face, marble-like, save for a spot of fevered color on either cheek. The interest was intensified when she gave her name as Zulieme Gonzalis. She asked to be sworn, and gave her testimony. It was in few words; it was plain she had strength to utter but a few words. Yet so clear and true was her voice, and so breathlessly still was the court-room, that her confession was distinctly heard.

It was a confession, brief but direct:

“I come here, a dying woman, to do what I ought to have done long ago, but had not courage. I come here to say that it was I who killed Captain Montcalm. I struck the blow partly through self-defense, and partly because I was maddened by his refusal to discard the woman he had married, and reinstate me in my rights. For, in the sight of God, I was Captain Montcalm’s wife. He had married me in my native land of Mexico twenty-two years before, when I was a mere child. The ceremony was not altogether legal. It was what we Mexicans call a left-handed marriage, but it was held to bind a man in honor, particularly if there are children. I had a child—an infant when its father left me with a promise to return. He stayed away so long I thought myself deserted. I followed him—sought him everywhere. He went abroad, and I failed to meet him face to face until the day before I stabbed him. I did not kill him deliberately. He is the only man I ever loved, and he cared for me more than I deserved. I had wronged him, but I thought myself deserted and betrayed, and I was reckless. I have suffered—oh! I have suffered remorseful agony through days, through sleepless nights. I have been ill for weeks. I did not know until to-day that another had been arrested and was being tried



for my deed. I could not let the other be punished for my sin. Do with me as you will. It does not matter. My days, my hours are numbered. I have suffered beyond what man can make me suffer.”

The confession had been made brokenly. Weakness and coughing had interrupted it. At its close the woman was exhausted. She lay back on the pillow, her pallid face looking spectral against its scarlet, the great burning eyes half closed. Lying so, she was slowly wheeled out of the court-room, in the midst of profound stillness.

The silence was presently broken by a murmur that grew louder and threatened to break into an acclaim of joyful congratulations of Mrs. Montcalm and Heathcliff. When Heathcliff approached his sister and silently took her hand, while she looked up at him, her face pale but glowing, her eyes swimming in tears, exclamations of uncontrollable sympathy burst from the crowd.

The case was not “*nol. pross’d.*” The prisoner was dismissed, freed from any shadow of guilt; the court adjourned. No action was taken against Mrs. Gonzalis. It was so plain that her life was near its close, and after all her deed had been homicide, not murder.

The crowd poured from the doors. In the court-yard outside were heard shouts for Heathcliff. Friends and strangers pressed forward to shake the hands of Heathcliff and his sister. Some of these hands the mayor pressed warmly. They were the hands of friends who had stood by him in his dark hour. To the congratulations of others, he responded courteously but coldly. He could not bring his straightforward nature to welcoming back these sunshine friends. His pale face flushed as the two figures approached—General Montcalm with his daughter upon his arm.

The general held out his hand.

“I have wronged you, Heathcliff,” said the bluff old soldier. “I am sorry for it. The cloud has passed; I



believe you to be as true a man as breathes. My hand upon it."

Honor said nothing, but her eyes were eloquent. They shone through tears, and the hand she gave to Heathcliff trembled like a white frightened dove. She said to Laura Montcalm:

"We were strangers almost; we will be strangers no longer. Will you not come home with us?"

Her father echoed the invitation; but Laura thanked them and said:

"I will go to my brother's. It will be better for us to spend the evening by ourselves."

"Not quite by ourselves," Heathcliff said when the others had turned away. "David Holt will be with us."

"Ah, dear old David!" she murmured, tears springing to her eyes.

"He is listening to that dubious compliment," her brother said, smiling.

She looked around and saw him standing near her, regarding her wistfully, a strange, old-young face with a pathos and nobleness in its look that attracted in spite of the rugged features. She held out her hands to him. He trembled as he took them and held them a moment in his awkward, silent way. He longed to press them in his great palms, but he dared not. He stood shy and speechless before the woman he had loved all his life. The sight of her a prisoner, the thought of how she had suffered, had unmanned him an hour ago.

There was one other in the little party gathered at the mayor's house that evening. Max Rubin made the fourth who sat at the pleasant table with its wax-lights and flowers, its fragrant coffee, its delicious oysters and crisp biscuits. Laura had never seen the fair-haired artist before to-day. She remembered having heard the name from Kildee's lips. She felt almost sure that this was



Max who had been the child's friend and protector. She would not ask. She would not cloud the sunshine of the hour by speaking of the lost girl, whose name always brought a shadow to Heathcliff's brow. She looked constantly at David. His face puzzled her; it stirred a recollection of another face. Could it be? But no; it was absurd to fancy it. Presently he caught her regarding him with that puzzled expression. He smiled.

"You look at me as though you expected me to turn into somebody else," he said. "Do I remind you of some one?"

"Yes," she said, hesitatingly; "but—"

"Of a poor daft fiddler nicknamed St. Peter, for instance?"

"It is St. Peter you remind me of," she cried; "but surely—"

"Surely I am he."

"How can it be?"

"I am simply shaven and shorn, clothed and in my right mind," David said. "At least partly in my right mind. There are dreamy lapses yet sometimes. I seem drifting back to that semi-conscious state, and recall myself with an effort."

"Do you remember nothing of what happened in that time?" Heathcliff asked.

"I have a dim recollection of some incidents—I seem to have seen them as a panorama on a stage when I was half asleep. I have a kind of picture of little Kildee the first time I ever saw her when she drew the street boys away from tormenting me by her dancing. I can see her striking her tambourine and whirling about, and hear her say, 'Give my uncle his fiddle and his pet or you shall have no more dances.' Then I have a more distinct recollection of the fire that awful night when she was rescued from the burning house. I was miserable thinking her dead till I saw her open her eyes in the carriage."



Laura looked at Max. Was David still daft?

“Does he not know?” she asked low. “Have you not told him that she—she was not rescued?”

“Oh!” cried Max, joyously; “it is you two who do not know. I have reserved a piece of good news for our desert. Kildée is not dead. She did not perish in the burning tenement house. Carleon saved her. It was another girl—a poor outcast, who lost her life.”

“Kildée alive! Kildée not burned!” cried Laura. Heathcliff did not speak; his look, his white parted lips showed his speechless emotion. “What became of her? Where did she go?” Mrs. Montcalm asked breathlessly.

“She went away with us—with Lottie and me. We left that morning early and joined the troupe at their next stopping-place.”

“It was the day she was to have been married,” murmured Laura, looking at Heathcliff. He spoke with an effort.

“I see how it was,” he said. “The poor child did not wish to marry me. She could not bring herself to say so—and—”

“Forgive her,” interposed Max. “She honored and esteemed you. She was deeply sensible of your kindness, and said it was a poor return to marry you. She thought herself no fit mate for you. She feared your kindness—she called it pity—had misled you when you chose her as a bride. She always thought so humbly of herself, for all she has a certain proud self-respect.”

“And she loved *you*?” Heathcliff said, looking steadily at Max.

He colored all over his fair face.

“She was my ward—my pet,” he said. “I found her, you know, when I was a boy, and helped to raise her. I have loved her always.”

“And she has married you?” asked Laura.

“No, no. We are not married yet. Indeed, I was



afraid until quite lately that she did not love me—only as a brother. She was strangely sad and reserved after we went away from here. Always she was sweet-tempered and thoughtful of others; that is her nature, but I missed her merry ways. I fancied she had some hidden regret, perhaps that she had gone with us, till she assured me that this was not so. St. Peter, I beg his pardon, David was sick, and we stopped with him—Kildee, Mrs. Duck and I. The other members of the troupe were obliged to leave us; they had to keep their engagements. We had stopped at a little way-side town—a little quaint hotel, but the people were so kind-hearted. Kildee was a faithful nurse. She had soon two patients on her hands. Mrs. Duck was taken with fever. We nursed them both. Dear little girl. What do you think she did in the intervals of that sick-bed night-and-day tendance? Our finances were very low, and she gave lessons in lace-work and embroidery to a class that some ladies had gotten up for her. I tried to give drawing lessons, but I had only three pupils. At last I got a remittance from my aunt in Minnesota; and just as things began to look bright, with both patients able to be up, our little nurse succumbed to the overwork and anxiety.”

“And she is ill?” asked Heathcliff, quickly.

“She has been ill—a short, sharp attack. She is better now—nearly well. Kildee is strong for all her fragile looks; and she has a hero’s resolution. She is the pluckiest little one I know of. We left her in kind hands, and we are going back to-morrow—at least, I am. She urged us to come as soon as David was able to travel. We were sure his testimony would be sufficient, we could not guess the further good luck of being able to produce Mrs. Gonzalis.”

“Strange,” David said to Heathcliff, “that you did not think of her before as the doer of that deed.”

“I did think of her,” he answered. “I told my sus-



picious to Laura's counsel, and he brought it forward in his speech to the jury, but we had no proof. She could not even be summoned, for I did not know where she was. I had lost sight of her, until last night a woman came to me, saying Mrs. Gonzalis was ill, dying of consumption at her house, on the outskirts of the town, and that she needed assistance. I gave the woman some money. To-day when Collier sent for me at the hotel, and I heard your story, I immediately went to see Mrs. Gonzalis and told her we had proof that she committed the deed another was being tried for, but that her confession was needed to give that other a full acquittal. She consented to be brought before the court more readily than I had hoped. She knew that she had but a little while to live, and she was very remorseful. After all, she had only acted in self-defense."

He saw his sister grow pale, and hastened to dismiss a gloomy subject.

"You were telling us of Kildee," he said. "Go on. You could not tell about any one we are more interested in. You said you were afraid until lately that she did not care for you except as a brother. I suppose you are now convinced."

"Yes," Max answered, blushing, and looking happy. "It was this way—if you will not think me foolish to talk of such sentimental matters. I had lifted her from the bed and set her in a wide arm-chair, and knelt down to adjust her foot-stool properly. She laid her little hand on my head in her pretty, caressing way, and said, 'Good boy, dear Max.' 'Am I dear to you, *pétite*?' I asked, 'tell me truly.' 'Why, of course you are, you doubting Thomas,' she answered smiling. But I was intensely serious. I said: 'If I am dear to you, why will you not marry me, Kildee? I love you so dearly; I have loved you so long. Something might part you from me again, and I should be miserable! Will you not be my very own?' I was still on my knees before her, and I held her hand and



looked at her. I am afraid tears were in my eyes. She said nothing for a minute, then she bent down and kissed me on the brow. ‘Yes, I will marry you,’ she said, ‘if you wish me to so very much, dear Max,’ So that was our engagement. Dear old Mother Duck, as we call her, woke up from her nap in her easy-chair and gave us her blessing.”

Heathcliff did not speak, nor did Laura. She looked grave, even sad. At length the mayor said:

“She is a good girl, a dear girl. I am sure she loves you, and will make you happy. Will you not bring her here and let her be married at my house?”

“I will bring her here; she must be married here, but not at your house, I think. My friends, I have another secret for you—a wonderful secret.”

“Concerning Kildee?”

“Yes—concerning Kildee—the secret of her parentage. She will be married at her father’s house, under her rightful name—though that father does not yet know. Do you remember a paper that you affixed your name to—you and Miss Montcalm on the night of the fire? It was a statement—a confession written by a woman, Nell Barnes, who died that night. Her body was half consumed by the fire.”

“And the paper was also burned?”

“No, it was saved. Kildee thrust it in her bosom and forgot it. Lottie found it when she undressed the little one that night and put it in her trunk. A few days ago she sent it to us. I have it in my pocket. You shall read it aloud to us.”

“We will go into the sitting-room then. I have ordered a wood fire to be kindled there. It is a little chill, and the resinous pine wood will make us feel cheerful.”

He led the way to the sitting-room; and the others followed, all but Laura. When his guests were seated by the ruddy pine fire, he came back to see why his sister did not



join them. He found her looking out at the gray twilight landscape, and when he laid his hand on her shoulder and drew her around, he saw tears in her eyes.

“You promised no more to look mournfully into the past. It is ungrateful after to-day’s deliverance,” he said.

“I was not thinking of my past, nor of myself.”

“Of whom then?”

“I was thinking of little Kildee.”

“And why think mournfully of her? She is happy. She has had the courage to take her fate in her own hands—she took advantage of circumstances and escaped from marriage with a man she could not care for to the arms of one she loved. What matter that she left hearts to ache at her supposed death? A woman does not think of others when she is happy with the one beloved.”

“You think so of Kildee?”

“I love Kildee. I do not blame her that she could not care for me as a husband and that she saved herself from a union with me, but—”

“You think she acted selfishly. She did not. Kildee could not be selfish. Her act was one of noble self-denial. She loved you; to be your wife, to minister always to your happiness, was her sweetest dream, and yet she went away. It was for your sake; it was that you might be happy with the woman you loved. She always feared that you did not love her; she knew it that night of the fire when you saved Honor Montcalm. She knew she stood in the way of the reunion of you and Honor—that but for her you would be reunited. She knew you would marry her because you had given your word, and you thought it your duty. It was too late for her to withdraw; it was her wedding-day, and to withdraw would cause reports hurtful to you. She saw it announced that she was dead, and she determined to seem dead that the man she loved and was grateful to might be happy.”



“Laura, how do you know this—how do you know the child cared for me?”

“I know by my woman’s intuition. Do you think I could live, day after day, near that ingenuous little heart, having it beat against mine in the night, and with the tell-tale face before me in the day, and not know her secrets?”

“You make me very unhappy.”

“I did not mean to tell you. You surprised me into betraying my thoughts. And I could not have you believe Kildee to be selfish and basely deceptive.”

“What is to be done?”

“Nothing. She is promised to Max; she will marry him. You are bound to Honor Montcalm—the only woman you love; you will marry her and be happy.”

“And Kildee?”

“She will not be miserable. She is too sensible, too affectionate, and Max is too kind. Perhaps she will have a child. A child is God’s compensation to a wife’s unsatisfied heart. Kildee’s destiny will be a very common one. How many women marry their ideals—the men they have loved best, or thought they could love best? And after all, it may be better that they do not. It is better for a woman not to marry the man she loves with her whole soul. It is giving him too much power over her. It is putting her life into his hands—a harp to break, to make music of or discord as he pleases. No, it is not happiest for a woman to marry the man she loves best. He alone can have power to wreck her life—as mine—”

Her voice trembled and broke on the last words. Heathcliff knew how deeply she felt what she so passionately spoke of. He took her in his arms and kissed her tenderly.

“Let us go and see how cheerfully the first fire of the season sparkles,” he said.

“And read that mysterious paper. I am impatient to



hear the secret of Kildee's birth. I am sure the blood in her veins is from no ignoble source."

Heathcliff's brow clouded at the mention of Kildee's name. Could Laura have read rightly? Had she loved him and left him because she loved him so well? As he looked back, a hundred little things told him yes.

## CHAPTER LI.

HAZARD HALL walked moodily under the mellow autumn sunshine. His vision of the future was clouded. His mercurial spirits had not their wonted spring.

"I need a glass of Montcalm sherry," he thought, "but I'll not go to the general's house. I'm not in a mood to hear Heathcliff's praises, and it would madden me to see the look of joy and triumph in Honor's eyes."

Even as the thought came to him, he caught sight of the Montcalm horses turning the street corner. There was no one in the carriage but the general. When he saw Hazard he signaled the driver to stop and called to him.

"Get in, my boy," he said. "Come, go with me. I have had a strange summons."

"In what direction?" asked Hazard, as he obeyed his patron's request and took the seat opposite him.

"Dearing Avenue."

"A dilapidated, poverty-stricken quarter; who can want you there?"

"The woman who made that confession in the court yesterday—the woman who ruined my brother's life before she cut it short. She is dying, the message runs. She has something of the utmost importance to say to me."

Hazard changed countenance. He said hastily:

"This is a private family matter. I ought not to intrude—"

"Don't speak of family in connection with that wom-



an," interrupted the general. "She is nothing in common with my family. As for privacy, her only connection with the Montcalm name (through a wretched boyish *faux pas* of my poor brother) was made public enough yesterday."

"Perhaps she only wishes to ask your forgiveness—"

"Then she may spare her breath. I can never forgive her. I hoped never to see her face again, but the message was imperative, and it was backed by a request from Heathcliff that I would grant a dying woman's wish."

"Heathcliff!" ejaculated Hazard, and his sensitive face became more clouded. He had a sudden vision of the day he had charged Heathcliff with knowing who his parents were. The mayor had not denied that he did know. A cold fear weighed on him. Presently, he said, in a voice he strove to make natural and careless.

"The woman said something in her confession yesterday about a child. She may wish to commend it to your care."

"Why should she?"

"For the sake of its blood—your brother's—"

The general smiled scornfully.

"What assurance would I have that the child was my brother's? Even if it were, I would have nothing to do with it. It was her blood—the blood of a low Mexican adventuress, who was unfaithful to my brother and hounded him to his death. I would not touch a creature that called her mother."

Hazard was silent; he spoke no more save to answer in monosyllables. They drove on under the yellow hazy October light. They left the busy and fashionable streets of the city and entered the decayed quarter known as Old Town. The current of business and fashion which had once flowed here had left it long ago. Undrained marshes poisoned the air with dampness and misama. The houses were old-fashioned, discolored, dilapidated.



The roofs were moss-grown, the walls weather-stained. About some of them the neglected shrubbery (planted long ago) grew rankly. Their brilliant blossoms were in strange contrast with the faded old houses. Before one of these decayed buildings the carriage stopped. It was the same house in which Carleon had held that fateful interview with Mrs. Gonzalis six months before. In the same lofty dim old room whose faded carpet she had then paced with tragic step, she lay now on an old-fashioned draped and canopied bed that looked like a hearse. As General Montcalm entered she turned her gleaming dilated eyes upon him. He fairly started as he met their look. They seemed to have a separate existence—to be two intense souls, dumbly appealing, defying, palpitating with pain.

Hazard had entered behind General Montcalm. He saw the white face lying upon the purple draped, hearse-like bed, he saw the half-appealing, half-defying eyes, and drew back. An instant after, he entered unnoticed and took up his position in the deep-casemented window, screened by the faded purple curtains.

Beside the bed sat Heathcliff and Max Rubin. On its foot sat the woman who had been Zulieme's hostess before—some friend, perhaps, of long ago—an olive-skinned, wrinkled face with hard eyes that yet softened when they rested upon the face on the pillow. Leaning against the mantel-piece was the black-robed gaunt figure of the priest, who had just confessed Zulieme and administered the sacrament. With his colorless, close-shaven face, his tonsured head and motionless limbs, he looked like a figure of stone.

General Montcalm bared his proud head and bent it in the presence of the Death that surely looked out from that woman's wan face and unearthly eyes.

She regarded him fixedly an instant. An expression of intense pain filled her eyes. The brothers had been greatly alike in features.



“Do you know why I have sent for you?” she asked presently.

“I do not.”

“Suppose I was to ask you to forgive me before I died?”

He was silent awhile; then he said coldly:

“Ask forgiveness of God.”

“You mean that *you* would not forgive. That is hard. Yet you will own I had provocation, more—”

The general made a gesture of haughty impatience.

“We will not speak of your provocation, as you are pleased to call it. My brother is dead—slain in his prime by your hand. You hounded him through his days. You were false to him. He was a noble boy; he might have had a noble life; you ruined it. I will not speak of him to you. Is there anything else you have to talk of? Can I do anything for you?”

“Nothing,” she answered, with a bitter smile. “You are late in asking. Once you might have helped me—might have saved me much suffering and—sin. I wrote to you again and again, imploring you to tell me where my child was, where his father was. You did not notice my letters.”

“I did not want my brother tormented by a— Pardon me. I do not want to say painful and useless things to you in your condition. This interview is wholly unnecessary. If there is nothing I can do for you, I will go.”

“Stop!” she cried. She partly raised herself from the pillows, her breath came in convulsive throes. She fell back and said feebly to the woman who bent near her: “Give me my medicine—a treble portion.”

“That will be too stimulating, dearie,” the nurse remonstrated.

“It does not matter. There is only a spark of life in me. Let it flame up and go out.”

The stimulant was given her. She drank it, and lay



quiet a moment, then she turned her eyes upon General Montcalm, and beckoned him to her command by the gesture of a fallen queen.

“This was not what I sent for you to say. I did not send for you to ask forgiveness of you. It would avail me nothing. I sent to confess another, perhaps a greater wrong that I have done you.”

“What can you mean?”

“You have two daughters, General Montcalm.”

“I have but one, madame—the other perished almost in babyhood.”

“Drowned by springing from the nurse’s arms into the swift stream that flows from Wonolla Springs?”

“Yes.”

“And she was your favorite child. The nurse had brought her to the train to say good-bye to you. You were going as far as New York with your brother, who was on his way back to Europe. He paid you a hurried visit—shortened because you learned through your spies that a woman was hunting him. In New York a summons came to you by telegraph: your child was drowned, your wife prostrated with grief. The body was not found. You took your wife to Europe by advice of her physicians.”

“What do you mean? Why do you bring up these details?”

“To make you feel what I shall tell you is true. I arrived in Wonolla one minute before the train on which you and your brother had taken passage left the station. I did not see you; you were already in the car. I saw your brother standing on the steps of the car in the act of giving back to the nurse a beautiful child he had just kissed. Before I could get to him the train moved away. I had heard he was in America, and I had tracked him here. I was hunting him to make him tell me what he had done with my child. I did not know that you also were in Wonolla—so far from home. I resolved to follow



Captain Montcalm to New York. An express train left in an hour. I would go in that. I had heard that he had married in Europe—a false report. ‘This, then, is his child,’ I thought, ‘tenderly cared for and caressed; while *my* child—*his* as well—where was it? In some foundling house or orphan asylum, neglected, starved, beaten.’ My brain was wild with the pain I had suffered, the drug I had swallowed as a nepenthe. I followed the nurse and found her standing on the bridge.

“ ‘Whose child is this?’ I asked.

“ ‘Mrs. Montcalm’s,’ she answered sullenly.

“ ‘Was it her father who was kissing it good-bye at the trian?’

“ ‘Yes,’ answered the woman. Her eyes were red, her face scowling. I questioned her and found she was bitter against the Montcalms. She was related to them, and she thought she should be treated as an equal—not as a servant. She was anxious to get money that she might leave them and hunt up a lover whom she thought they had separated her from. The idea flashed into my half-crazed brain to bribe the girl to give me the child and pretend that it had sprung from her arms and been drowned. I acted upon it. She held out till she saw the gold, and then she half consented. I snatched the child, wrapped it in my cloak, and hurried to the train which was then starting. I will go with it to New York, I said, leave it with a woman there while I find Captain Montcalm. I will say to him, ‘I have your child—your petted darling. Give me back my child and you shall have yours; refuse, and I will never tell you where she is—not if you kill me or imprison me. I am desperate. I do not care. She shall be raised in poverty and shame!’

“ I did not carry out my programme. An accident happened to the train. I was bruised and my arm broken. The child was not hurt. Before I had quite recovered I knew I had been in error—that it was General and not



Captain Montcalm's child I had taken. I would have restored her, but you had sailed for Europe. I had no money to follow, and I had a horror of the ocean. I kept the little one. I was not always kind to her. She had the Montcalm face, and in some dark moods I could have crushed her for the look there was in her eyes. But I did not mean to leave her to starve in a garret in St. Louis. I was trying to work honestly for my bread. I fell in the street from overheating, fatigue and weakness—brought on by poor food. I was taken to the hospital. I had a long period of illness—a longer period of mental derangement."

She stopped, her voice had sunk to a whisper.

Leaning toward her, the general had drunk in her story. When she paused, he said:

"And the child starved in the garret?"

"No; that young man standing there found her, and took care of her, until some of his friends adopted her."

"Were they—were they honest people, madame?"

"As honest as you or your daughter, General Montcalm. They raised her honestly—so honestly that when I found her and claimed her and would (God forgive me) have helped to do her a wrong, her own purity saved her."

The last words were hardly audible.

"Where is she—speak, woman, I command—I entreat you!" he cried seizing her arm. He thought her dying or dead. Her lids were closed and her white lips parted.

"Where is she?" he demanded, turning to Max.

Zulieme revived. She waved her delicate hand at Max to stay his answer.

"Let me first give you proof of my story," she said.

"There is a small chain around my neck; Inez, unfasten it."

The dark woman with the hard, bead-black eyes rose, un-



did the clasp of the slender chain and took it from Zulie-me's neck. As she lifted it and General Montcalm caught sight of the cross-shaped locket of gold and jet that dangled from it, he stretched out his hand eagerly. He touched a spring, and a lid in the center of the cross flew open, showing the miniature face of a stately old lady.

"My mother's face," said the general. "My child had this around her neck when she was drowned. We never found the body; we supposed the whirling current had carried it off or swept it under the rocks. Some one else may have found the body, and this chain may have been—"

"Pardon me for interrupting you, general," said Max, stepping forward and holding out a folded paper. "Here is a confession of the nurse—Nell Barnes—witnessed, as you see, by Ira Heathcliff and Honor Montcalm. Your daughter has doubtless told you of this paper. It was not burned, as supposed, but it was safely preserved."

General Montcalm unfolded the paper with a shaking hand. He ran his eye rapidly over it—his expression of doubt gave place to one of assurance. He looked up and said huskily:

"The child—where is she—she was my darling—her mother's heart was broken at her loss. And you! woman, God may forgive you, I never will. Young man, she says you took care of my child. Does she still live? Where is she?"

"She was called Kildee—a pet name—she knew no other; she was with your daughter in the room with Nell Barnes when the woman died, and when the fire occurred."

"And was left in the burning house and perished. Great God! I remember! My daughter was strongly drawn to that girl—she grieved over her horrible death. And she was her sister—my own little Ruth. Why did you resurrect this crime? Why did you tell me my child lived, only to add that she died before I knew her?"



“Be calm, general,” said Heathcliff. “Your daughter did not perish in the flames. It was another who was burned. It was she whom Carleon rescued. She did not want to marry me; and so she went away with her foster sister. She is not very far off and will come to you soon. You will find her as true and pure as though she had been reared in your own home, side by side with her sister Honor.”

The general dropped into a chair and bent his face upon his hands. When he raised his head, his eyes were moist and shining. He got up and shook hands warmly with Max.

“It seems I owe you unspeakable thanks, my friend. I must know you better,” he said.

Then he turned and saw Hazard still sitting in the window, half screened by the faded purple drapery. The boy was very pale. More than once he had been on the point of stealing out of the room, but a strange attraction chained him to his seat, and turned his eyes persistently to the white face upon the pillow.

And yet she had not seen him.

General Montcalm broke into an excited, happy laugh, and cried out to Hazard:

“Hall, do hear this wonderful story! Is it true or am I dreaming? Tell me!” He seized Hazard by the arm and drew him from the window. “Was ever anything more wonderful? I have two daughters—my little Ruth was not drowned—she was not burned. She is alive; I shall see her. What is the matter? You look miserable. You must be happy. Do you not congratulate me?”

“With all my heart, general.”

At the sound of his voice, a spasm passed over the death-like face on the pillow; her eyes flashed open—wildly, eagerly. They fell upon Hazard, and a great light of love and longing leaped into them.

“My boy, my son, my darling!” she cried; “you did



come to me! You did come to see me die. God bless you! I—”

She stopped; the look upon Hazard's face choked the words in her throat—a look, dark with scorn, loathing, fury. Her arms, that she had stretched out to him, dropped at her side.

“Forgive me,” she said faintly. “I did not mean to speak—the sight of you was so sudden. I meant never to tell—never to let the world know. But it is done now. Oh! for pity's sake do not look at me so! Come to me, my child!”

“You are delirious, crazy!” exclaimed Hazard, white with anger. “I am no child of yours.”

Her eyes flashed as a flame leaps up from wan ashes.

“You are my son,” she cried. “I have nursed you at this bosom. I have mourned for you, prayed for you, sought you everywhere. I caught this last sickness following after you in the night. I have watched your bed unknown when you were sick. There stands a man who knows you are my son. For my sake, he traced you out and found you at the monastery. Afterward you ran away from the Catholic school; he saw you here and knew you. He has your letters written to the father superior, asking him to tell you of your parentage. The priest sent them to him. Heathcliff would not tell you who your parents were. He did not want to shame you—to spoil your career. I ought not to have spoken. I meant to have died and made no sign. But I saw you; I longed to hear you call me mother. Oh, my son, do not deny me! It is too hard, too cruel to disown a dying mother, though she be—what Fate has made me. General Montcalm, you can not turn against my boy, for he is of your own blood—the Montcalm blood.”

Hazard's eyes, half proud, half imploring, sought the general's face. He stood (after the first start of surprise) listening to this unexpected revelation with stern, unmov-



ing features. Now a look of cold scorn came into his face.

“The Montcalm blood, with the bar sinister!” he said. “Do you imagine I would recognize it, even were it proved the Montcalm blood? which it is not. There is no trace of it *there*” (turning his cold eyes on Hazard). “It is your face; why did I not see it before?”

“He is your brother’s son—I swear it!”

“He is the son of a child-stealer, a man-slayer—a—!”

“Hush!” she said, sharply, holding forth her clasped imploring hands. “Do not say it. He scorns, he hates me now; it is enough. But it is no fault of his that he is my son; and the world will never know. He is gifted; he is ambitious; you are his patron. Do not cast him out of your favor.”

“If he can deny you, if he can prove that—”

“Stop!” cried Hazard. His face was white and drawn, but the manhood in him had awakened. “I forbid you to sting her with another word. I will not deny her. Mother!” he knelt at the bedside; “you are my mother! I feel it. I felt it when you first spoke to me that dark night in the streets. Mother,” he bowed his head over her and pressed his lips to hers, “live that I may take care of you—that I may love you,” he said, raising his head a little that he might see her face.

A wonderful light transfigured that face. For an instant it glowed in more than its youthful loveliness. She lifted her arms and clasped the neck of her boy. She tried to speak, her lips parted and a smile of unutterable joy and tenderness played about them; then she drew him down to her and held him to her heart. In the stillness was heard her quick, sobbing breath—once, twice, then all was silent. Hazard felt her arms relax. Softly he unclasped them and looked at her face.

“She is dead!” he said. He kissed the still smiling lips, and bowed his head upon her pillow.



## CHAPTER LII.

A DARK night in November; the stars obscured, a mist of cold rain chilling the atmosphere. But the lights of the city gleam out, and there is a continuous roll of carriages in the street below the dimly lighted room in which Hazard Hall sits alone. He hears the roll of the carriages; he pictures to himself the curveting horses, the fair forms upon the velvet cushions inside. He hears them stop before the Sharon House which is a blaze of gas, for it is the evening of the Inauguration Ball. General Montcalm was installed Governor of the State two days before; to-night the wealth, the intellect and beauty of Wallport are assembled in the grand ball-room of the Sharon House to do honor to the new chief of state.

The boy who sits alone in his dingy, ill-furnished, almost garret room above a row of shops, sinks his head on his hands and remembers how he had once imagined the scene of to-night. A month ago, when he was working for Montcalm's election—scribbling, stump-speaking, lying unscrupulously, he would lie at night unable to sleep, though it was usually past midnight, because of the feverish throbbing of his ambitious brain, and picture to himself that scene of prospective triumph—his patron's inauguration as governor and the ball that would follow it. He had seen himself moving through the lighted room at the side of the governor—triumphant, envied, the incumbent of an office of honor. He had seen himself leading off the dance with Honor Montcalm—queen of the night by right of her regal beauty and her proud position.

One month ago this picture had seemed a shadow of what might well be. And now! He raised his head and looked about him, then across at the glittering windows of the ball-room. He had no part in that gay scene. No one



would ask after him, no one would miss him. He sat here at the uncurtained window with the mist of rain drifting in on his haggard face. His clothes were rusty, his hair disordered, his cheeks hollow, his eyes dull and hopeless. Was this the bright, elastic, self-confident boy, who had called himself an exponent of the Nineteenth Century spirit of shrewdness and push and wide-awake tact; who had believed in himself and in his power to compass his ends by dint of boldness and brains?

One month ago he had been pointed out as the brilliant young journalist, the dashing boy speaker, the pet of the probable governor, the attendant, perhaps the favored suitor, of Honor Montcalm. And now—what a swift succession of misfortunes had brought him low. He had lost the prestige of being Montcalm's pet. The story of his illegitimate origin had somehow gone abroad, and in that proud old city this alone was equivalent to social ostracism. Then "The Rattler" went down. It had been foredoomed to a meteoric course. Launched with borrowed capital and much brains, but little ballast of system or practical knowledge, it (like so many party journalistic crafts) had just enough financial steam to fight through one stirring political campaign. One of its brilliant young editorial staff had gone to his neglected law, another had run off from his debtors, another had found a place on the old slow but sure daily which "The Rattler" had been wont to ridicule as "the moss-backed terrapin." But Hazard had not obtained any place. With all his quick, versatile talent he was known to be not a steady worker. He was too erratic to suit these old systematic stagers. And he had been too stinging in his satire against them. The light shafts he had sent had been too keenly barbed. Besides, he was no longer a popular favorite. His extreme course against Heathcliff had reacted against him, and his own haughty, capricious manners made him enemies. He shut himself up and wrote earnestly and hopefully. He wrote an article



for a review—it was declined; a sketch for a magazine—it was returned; a spicy article for a New York daily—it came back with the comment: “Pretty fair, but not suitable for our columns.” Then he lost belief in his capacity. He had thought himself a genius; it was evident he was not above mediocrity. He found it impossible to obtain employment in his own line—he tried to get it in some other. But he did not succeed. To his sensitive, sore spirit it seemed that every door was barred. He became utterly desperate. He took to drinking. His habits had never been steady; but he had not before drank to excess. Now he took to it as a nepenthe for the mortification, the shame, the misery that had come so crushingly in the hour when he seemed on the high-road to success. He drank, and the subtle poison made him lose his remaining energy and the power that was still in him to rise above the fate.

Why did he not leave Wallport? For one thing, he had no money. The fall of “The Rattler” found him with no means, and a number of little debts hanging over him. He parted with his books, his pictures and his watch. He left his boarding-house and hid himself in the dingy half attic several stories above a shoe-shop, whence he only emerged at night. Where were his friends in the meantime? He had made few genuine friends. He was too careless, selfish and imperious. Some who came forward, he repulsed coldly; he read pity in their eyes, and he was too proud to accept pity. He haughtily, almost rudely, rejected General Montcalm’s offers of help. The icy words with which the head of the old Montcalm line had rejected any personal intercourse with the basely born scion had so stung the proud soul of the spoiled boy that he would have starved rather than take a favor from the hands of his former patron. One day he received a letter addressed in General Montcalm’s handwriting. His pale cheek flushed; he tore open the envelope; out dropped a check for five hundred



dollars and a card on which was written, "Do not refuse the inclosed; it is simply in discharge of a debt."

He smiled bitterly.

"He would not invite me to his house; he would not shake hands with me in the street; does he think I would take his money?" he said, as he crushed the card in his fingers.

He thrust the check into an envelope, addressed it to General Montcalm and dropped it into the mail-box.

Heathcliff's overtures met with no better success. The mayor's heart was full of pity for the boy. He went to see him one night at his boarding-house. He offered to assist him in any way he might; he assured him of the sincerity of his motives, but the embittered boy would not believe him. He answered coldly that he was no beggar for money or for friendship; all he asked was to be left alone. Soon after this he quit his boarding-house and left no word as to where he had gone. As he was never seen on the streets in the day, it was supposed by the few who thought about him at all, that he had left Wallport. His "den" of refuge was in the heart of the city. He shunned companionship, but the rattle and roar of the streets, the scream and hiss of the locomotive that came up to him took away the sense of utter solitude. By day, he sat and brooded over his wrongs, or tried to forget them in drink. He could no longer afford wine; he resorted to the coarser stimulant—whisky. At night he slouched his hat over his face and went out to walk the streets aimlessly, that he might tire himself and be able to sleep. He scurried on like a haunted thing, looking out from under his slouched hat—out at the windows of houses in which he had once been a welcome visitor—at Montcalm's study where he had sat planning political schemes with the general, at the opera-house, where he had sat beside Honor Montcalm.

Every day his clothes grew rustier, his face more haggard, his energies weaker, his prospects more hopeless.



One meal a day came to him from a second-rate eating-house which he had once scorned to patronize, for this boy was dainty to fastidiousness in his food and clothes. But his means were now exhausted. He had spent his last dime to-day, to buy the stimulant which had become necessary to bolster his relaxed nerves. He took out the little blue and gold purse which Lottie had made and sent him on his last birthday. Nobody but little Lottie kept count of his birthdays. The recollection of her came over him to-night with a flitting pang of tender regret—a passing thought of seeking her. For she was in the city. He had seen the flaming bills on the walls announcing that the troupe to which she was attached would play in Wallport to-night. He had read the newspaper praises of the “rising young actress.” “Rising” was what *he* had been called little more than a month ago. “And now,” he said to himself, with a harsh laugh, “now I bid fair to ‘rise’ in the world at a rope’s end. I am the dog going downhill, which everybody feels, in duty bound, to kick.”

No, he would not go to see Lottie. The last time he had seen her he had patronized her in his airy, *en prince* manner. She had felt it too. She had been no little hurt, and she retorted in one of her flashes of piquant anger; her blue eyes raining and lightening at the same time. It was natural she should feel a little malicious triumph at his coming down. But Lottie’s heart was tender as a child’s. She would pity him, and pity from her he could not bear. He would not subject himself to it. He would not go to see her.

Go to see her, indeed! He laughed self-scornfully at the thought as he glanced at his reflection in the little cracked mirror on the mantel-piece.

“I look like a tramp or a jail-bird,” he said to himself. His cheeks were sunken, his eyes blood-shot. His nerves were unstrung; his hands trembled. He felt flaccid and miserable.



“I *must* have a drink,” he said, and he took up the little purse. He turned it wrong-side out. A tiny coin fell into his hand. He knew what it was, though he had forgotten it was there. It was a little gold dollar—one of three (he had given two to a child) which the purse contained when it came to him.

“These are for seed,” Lottie wrote, “and for good luck. Mind you don’t lose them or spend them, unless to bring good to somebody, else you’ll lose your luck.”

“Lose my luck,” he repeated sardonically. He turned to the window, for the band had begun to play in the ball-room across the street. What a glorious, merry burst! One end of the long ball-room faced this street. The large glowing windows were nearly opposite where he sat. He could see figures crossing the light spaces—magnificently dressed women and distinguished-looking men. Many famous beauties and noted men will grace Governor Montcalm’s inauguration ball.

What happy faces! Ah! there are two young men he knows well. And there is Vaughn, now upon the “Times,” formerly one of his *confrères* in the poor dead “Rattler.” Would he himself were dead. He had wished this often of late. He has done more than wish. With that reckless disgust of life which strangely enough assails the young more than the old, in time of trouble, he has thought of death as a refuge. He has planned to take his own life. But how? His keenly sensitive nerves shrink from the thought of pain, his imagination recoils from the vision of death and the grave. He tries to think of some way to die painlessly. Concentrated prussic acid? Yes, that kills with the swiftness of lightning, but how to obtain it? No druggist will sell such deadly poison. A shot through the brain or the breast? But what if his trembling hand sent the leaden messenger through a part not vital? People had lived with balls in their lungs—lived to suffer through long years. People had lived with bullets imbedded in their



brains—lived to be idiots or paralytics—fate worse than death.

To open a vein and bleed to death, they had told him, was almost painless, but he could imagine the sickening horror of watching your own life-blood flow out in a great crimson jet. Then the faintness—the numbness seizing the limbs, the body, the heart. If one might inhale an anæsthetic the instant the vein was opened, and be insensible to the gush of one's red life, the sickness, and numbness!

Penknife and chloroform—these would do the death business painlessly. The ghastly thought flashed into his fevered brain as he sprung to his feet, maddened by the merry music—the brilliant scene painted on the darkness of the night, in which his own gay, *insouciant* set moved happy, and heedless of his misery.

He must have a drink.

There was Lottie's little gold dollar. He had it clinched in his palm. It was for "luck," she had said. Well, luck was gone forever. The charm had not worked—let the talisman go. He crushed his hat over his eyes and went out into the street. He would not enter one of the glittering fashionable (!) liquor shops; he might meet some one who knew him. He hurried down the sidewalk and turned into another street. Here, he presently entered a dingy bar-room, before the door of which a negro was playing "Zip Coon" on a cracked fiddle. He got his flask filled, and threw the coin on the counter. The bleary-eyed bar-keeper picked it up and held it to the smoky lamp.

"Hain't you got a more convenient sort o' money about you, young man?" he asked. "I don't like to take these gold scraps; don't know whether they're passin' now, and they're mighty onhandy."

"I have no other money," he said shortly.

"Jack, you're takin' the kid's seed-corn," sung out a half-drunken sot, who lay on the counter smoking a foul pipe. "Ain't yer ashamed?"



“I kin stand it, if he kin,” was the answer, followed by a burst of coarse laughter.

Hazard picked up his change and escaped from the reeking den. He was sick with self-loathing. He felt degraded; he was wounded in all the finer instincts that remained to him, but he felt no spring of hope that would help him to rise. He could not rise here, and he had neither money nor energy to get away. He had lost the belief in himself—all his proud, airy self-assurance. He had lost hope, friends, everything but life; and of what account was life? How useless and cowardly to cling to life when it was a hateful burden. He would cling to it no longer.

He had still a half-dollar left of Lottie's little coin. He had thought to buy bread with it to stay the craving for food, for he had had no dinner. But dead people do not need to eat. He would buy chloroform instead—he had the penknife in his pocket. The red and gold globes in the window of a druggist's shop caught his eye. He went in and asked for fifty cents' worth of chloroform. While the clerk waited upon him, a carriage stopped at the door—a little water-proofed figure alighted and entered the shop. She walked to the opposite counter. Hazard paid no attention to her, but as he was hurrying out, she spoke to the clerk only to say he need not trouble himself to wrap up the French powder she had just bought, as she would drop the box in her reticule, but the silvery voice struck a chord of remembrance. It was Lottie's voice. He involuntarily stopped and uttered an exclamation. She turned, and knew him in spite of the slouched hat. She was about to speak his name, but he rushed out of the shop. She turned to the clerk:

“That is a former acquaintance of mine,” she said. “Do you know where he is stopping?”

“I do not,” the clerk answered. “I thought he had left the city.”

It was not the first time she had made inquiries about



her old friend and boy-sweetheart. Ten minutes after her arrival (at noon) in Wallport, she had asked about him of a mutual acquaintance. The answer gave her a pang.

“He is fast going to the dogs.”

She had seen Kildee but a few minutes. The Montcalm carriage came to the hotel for her, and she drove to the mansion and went straight to the room of the governor's newly found daughter.

“It is our same Kildee,” she said, as she hugged and kissed the little one. Then she put her back a little, as she had done once before on meeting her, and studied the girl's face.

“You are a queer little sprite. I'll never quite make you out,” she said when they had talked together awhile. She knew Kildee too well to fancy she would have her head turned by her unexpected good fortune, but she had thought to find her more elated. Kildee spoke with proud affection of her father and her beautiful stately sister, but there was no joyous enthusiasm in her manner.

“Young as she is, it would be natural for her to be in a white glow of enthusiasm,” thought Lottie. “And her approaching marriage with Max, she spoke of it so quietly, almost without a blush. But then Kildee always was an odd little thing,” mused Lottie. “She is not a bit flattered by the prospect of the big ball to-night—her first ball, and she the governor's new-found daughter—the heroine of the night, and lovely as any stray Peri.”

Kildee was on the point of dressing for the ball. Her simple, perfect dress of cloud-like white tulle lay on the bed, and Honor had been curling her pretty hair. She showed Lottie her father's gift of pearls, because she knew the little actress took delight in looking at such things.

But Lottie did not forget what had been uppermost in her mind when she drove to the mansion.

“Tell me about Hazard,” she said. Then, for the first time during the interview, Kildee showed deep feeling.



“I can not tell you how sorry I am for him,” she said. “We are forbidden here to mention his name. My father loved him so much, he can not bear to remember that he—”

“Was unfortunate in the matter of birth,” spoke up spunky Lottie. “A nice thing to desert a boy about who has ruined himself trying to serve him.”

“Hush, dear. You don’t know the strong, deep-rooted prejudices of people who belong to these old proud families. And then poor Hazard’s mother killed my father’s brother, who was brother and son in one to him; and she was—an outcast.”

“Could he help it?” cried Lottie.

“No, and it does not seem just that he should suffer for it, but one can not mend such things. I could not help writing him a little letter, just a few friendly words—I dared not tell my father. He never answered it. He sent back the check my father inclosed to him.”

“Good for him; I’m glad he did,” cried Lottie, her eyes sparkling through the tears. “But you say he has left the city?”

“I heard so, but my sister’s maid is sure she saw him on the street one night this week.”

“If he’s here I’ll find him if it’s possible,” cried Lottie. “I wouldn’t turn on my heel to ask about him if he were prosperous, but now that he’s down and his pretended friends have dropped off from him, it’s the right time for a true friend to come in and give him the warm hand of sympathy, if no more.”

This interview had taken place not two hours ago. Lottie had thought about Hazard persistently ever since. She was now on her way to the theater (she was not to appear in the first scene), and she had stopped at the drug-store to get a particular kind of French powder she fancied she would need in making up to look ghastly in a death scene. Standing at the counter she heard Hazard’s exclamation,



turned quickly and had a glimpse of his haggard face. She hurried out to the sidewalk and saw him crossing the street.

“Let the hack wait here a minute; come with me,” she said to her brother, who was waiting to hand her into the carriage.

He was accustomed to her little imperious commands and caprices. He only said: “Didn’t you find what you wanted here?” and she replied by taking his arm and drawing him in the direction in which she saw Hazard going. Keeping him in sight, she flew on, making her boy-brother grumble at her rapid pace. She had just stepped upon the sidewalk that ran along the Sharon House, when she saw Hazard stop before a flight of steps that led up from the street. He paused an instant as though it were not a pleasant thing to go up into that dreary unlighted region, and then began to ascend the steps.

“He lives somewhere up there; I’ll find him to-morrow before we go away,” Lottie said to her brother. “It’s Hazard Hall I’m talking about. He was in the drug-store, and I wanted to find out where he is staying; nobody could tell me. He’s under the weather here, poor boy, and he’s lost his position. I’ll ask papa to give him Jack Gilbert’s place in the troupe. Hazard is long way a better actor than Jack. Papa trained him, you know, and I think I can get him to join us. I’ll try to-morrow.”

Would there come a to-morrow for Hazard Hall? He went up to his dreary room. The light from the gleaming windows opposite streamed into it, and lighted up its barrenness. The music was louder than before. The rain had ceased, the night had grown warmer, and the windows of the ball-room were open. Hazard could plainly see the fair faces and richly dressed forms of women, with their escorts, pass by the lighted vistas. He went to the mantel-piece and took down an opera-glass (too much worn to find a purchaser) and seated himself at the window. With the lorgnette to his eye, he drew close to him the figures of the



promenaders. Presently his fingers closed spasmodically on the glass. Honor Montcalm had flashed upon his sight. How beautiful, how radiant! Pearls and soft laces, and white jasmine flowers enhanced her fairness. She walked beside Heathcliff. He, too, looked happy and handsome. They were soon to be married, rumor said. There would be a double wedding at the mansion. The governor's newly found young daughter, with the romantic history and the lovely face, would marry the artist who had saved her from starving in a rat-haunted garret. He was no match for her now, but the governor was grateful and indulgent, and the girl was promised to the artist before her father found her.

Hazard's face darkened yet more as the broad-shouldered, military form of the governor came in sight. He had his new daughter (Ruth, they called her) on his arm; he was looking down with proud fondness into the sweet upturned face, with the dark curls clustering about the white, low brow. On the governor's left arm, leaned the beautiful woman whom Hazard had so nearly brought to the scaffold. She wore black velvet. Her arms, her throat, her brow, with its crown of dark-gold hair, were marble white. There was a shade of sadness on her face. A white flower fell from her breast. Some one from behind picked it up and gave it to her. She turned and smiled on him—an odd-looking man, with white hair and rugged face, magnetic from the earnest, almost weird power of a pair of wonderful, lustrous eyes. Evidently she gave him permission to keep the flower, for he bowed, and looked confused, but happy. When she passed he came to the window, and, standing there, pressed the flower to his lips.

Hazard knew him. It was the man whose sudden emergence from the death in life of idiocy, through the magic of science, had lost him (Hazard) the seven thousand dollars reward, and had saved Laura Montcalm from the gallows, or a life-long prison. He had been her foster-



brother, her friend and guardian; he had loved her long and silently: would he speak now? She had proved his loyal heart; she had learned through bitter suffering that a true and loving heart is a better guarantee for married happiness than splendid gifts of mind and person.

“They are all happy,” thought the boy, who watched the panorama of bright faces with hollow, hungry eyes, feeling as though he gazed upon Paradise from the depths of Purgatory. “There is love and happiness and hope for them all—for every being in the wide world but me. For me there is nothing. Not one human being cares whether I live or die.”

Once more he raised the opera-glass to his eyes. It fell from his shaking hand. Honor Montcalm stood at the window alone, looking out on the clouded night. The proud sweet beauty he had wildly dreamed to win—the goddess shape he had encircled with his arms in a waltz of Weber’s—the very same that was beginning now. That lovely hand holding back the purple curtain, how often it had been upon his arm. And now what a gulf yawned between them! She stood there just across the street. They were all there to do honor to the man—her father—whom he had worked with all his bright, ingenious wit to put in office. They were all there, happy, and he was here peniless, starving, miserable. Curses on a life that was the prey of such unjust Fate! it was not worth clinging to.

He caught up the flask from the table and drank half its contents. He looked down at the little knife and the bottle of chloroform. He took up the knife, opened one of the small, delicate blades and passed his finger across its keen edge. He bared his arm and held it down to the dull lamp, looking hard at the blue throbbing vein just beneath the delicate skin.

“It is but one little stroke,” he said; “a quick slash, and no more.” He took a linen towel (he would have gone without salt in his bread rather than use a towel of cotton)



and rolled it funnel-wise; he opened the bottle of chloroform, but instead of pouring the subtle fluid into the towel funnel, he threw both on the table beside the knife, and, turning away, began to walk up and down his carpetless room. He had fully determined to end the "fever called living" this very night. But on the instant he raised the vial containing the pain-destroying anæsthetic, the doubt had darted across his mind—what if death is not surely the end of life? The doubt had never seriously presented itself till that moment. He was a born unreligionist. The organ of reverence was wanting in his handsome head—it was as flat on top (save for the graceful rings of dark hair) as the head of a panther of the jungle, or a rattlesnake of the wilds. Then he was thoroughly imbued by reading and association with the materialistic spirit of the age—the spirit that looks with cold scorn upon the idea of immortality as a superstitious dream for which Nature furnishes not the slightest material—Nature which has never sent a glimmer of light beyond the black wall of death, which teaches that after life there is but decay and disorganization; no immortality except in life transmitted through offspring. He had held that religious systems were delusive ropes of sand spun in the world's dim ages by scheming priests for the sake of temporal power, and clung to by the wishes, fears, and vain conceit of weak mortals, who can not believe that they are born to die forever. He had often written wild verses after Swinburne, thanking

"All gods that be  
That no life lives for ever,  
That dead men rise up never,  
That even the weariest river,  
Winds some time safe to sea."

He had quoted Byron—"Men, miserable as they are, cling so to anything like existence that they will hug the merest dream to their hearts, and prefer even damnation to external quiet. The insects!"



But as he walked the echoing floor of his room to-night, there came into his almost maddened brain a feeling that all this was false. An instinct, imbedded in his consciousness, above reason, beyond Nature, made him feel that when he should draw the steel across the artery and see his life ebb away, when he should fall on the floor in its red pool—dead—*this* would not be the end. Pulse and breath would go, but something would stay—something would still be—something that was himself. The feeling came from no instilled impression—he had a strong sense of this—no; it lay back of all teaching—it came from somewhere beyond reason or induction or education—it was woven in his being.

It troubled him. If this was not the end—what was there to come? If there was another life, what was it like? He was too wild to think coherently; he was too frenzied to fear the doubt that had risen up like a warning ghost on the edge of that grave he was about to dig for himself. “This will lay the ghost,” he cried, and drained the last drop of fiery liquid from the flask.

They were still playing a waltz for the merry dancers, but its measure had changed. It was now fast and furious. Though still sweet—so maddeningly sweet! How the dancers spun to its wild measure—whirling like brilliant blossoms in the mad maelstrom of melody. He too would whirl. It should be his dance of death. Round and round he spun till brain and strength gave way, and he sunk upon a chair. His eyes blazed wildly. He seized the bottle of chloroform and dashed its contents into the linen funnel.

“Now to solve the mighty problem—now to dare the leap in the dark,” he cried. “Whatever be beyond it, it can not be worse than what I leave.”

He flung his bared arm across the table, and drew the keen knife-blade across the pulsing artery. A red jet leaped high. He shuddered and buried his face in the drug-steeped linen. In an instant he was insensible.



## CHAPTER LIII.

NOTWITHSTANDING the grand Inauguration Ball, the theater was moderately full. Lottie was late in making her appearance. The manager frowned as she tripped up the greenroom stairs, but she smiled back at him in her half-saucy, half-deprecating way, as she opened the enveloping water-proof and showed herself ready dressed for the second act, on which the curtain was about to rise. She went through her part with her usual grace and cleverness, but in the last scene she had a strange experience. She had one of those unaccountable impressions, visions—warnings—call it what you may—that, though out of nature, are yet not of uncommon occurrence, and form the best proof of the existence of a soul, independent of the material organization.

In the play Lottie had to recline on a sofa, in pretended death, while the villain of the piece enters and goes through a scene of remorse. The lights were low, the orchestra was playing soft, sad music; Lottie lay listening to the actor's impassioned soliloquy. Suddenly his voice seemed to die away—her sense of her present surroundings vanished; Hazard's face rose before her, ghastly, with a desperate expression upon it. He seemed seated at a table in a dim, low room, his hand clinched something, she could not tell what, but it impressed her as something with which to take his life. That look of desperate resolve, the haggard despair in his eyes, the clinched hand!—the conviction was lightning-like—he is about to commit suicide.

So vivid was the vision, so strong the conviction, that she came near screaming aloud. It was gone in a breath, but the impression remained. She could not shake it off.

The scene was over; it was the last of the play; she went at once to her brother.



“Fred,” she said, “did you hear what it was Hazard asked for at the drug-store?”

“Yes, I did; it was chloroform.”

She drew her breath sharply.

“That settles it,” she said. “He’s up to some mischief, and I am going to him—right now, and you are going with me.”

“Lottie, are you crazy?”

“Not a bit. I am as sound as a Mexican dollar. All the same, I am going to hunt up Hazard—I had a most vivid warning about him just now—and you are going with me, or I’ll never tie your neck-ribbon, or call you a darling Duck while I live. Come right on.”

“You’ll wait for the governor and the old lady?”

“No; I haven’t time even to tell them.”

She hurried him down-stairs and into a waiting hack.

“This will all turn out a humbug, and won’t I laugh at you!” grumbled the boy.

“I’ll give you leave to laugh. May be it will all turn out a humbug. I hope it will, but I never saw anything plainer in my life than that warning vision, and I sha’n’t be able to sleep to-night till I know it’s all right with Hazard. My! it’s raining again—such a chilly mist!”

She shivered and drew her dark wrap about her bare arms. She had not taken time to change her stage dress.

“Gather up my things, please, ma’am,” she had said to the good Mother Duck as she flitted past her. “I’ve got to go in an awful hurry. I’ll tell you about it later.”

“Drive fast,” she said to the hackman, slipping an extra half dollar in his hand.

In two minutes she was set down at the foot of the stairs that went up over the shop. The street was still filled with music from the Sharon House where the ball was at its height. Lottie ran up the narrow dark stairs ahead of her brother. Somebody on the street had told Fred that the rooms on the second floor were all lawyers’ offices, and the



young man must be lodging on the floor above. The landing of the first stairs was lighted only by the street gas-lamp, but she made her way to the next flight of steps. When she reached the head of these, she found the narrow passage in darkness. A dim light, however, came from beneath one of the doors that opened on the passage. Lottie knocked sharply on the door. She put her head to the aperture, and a strong odor of chloroform came to her.

“Force it open,” she said to her brother. “Don’t you smell the chloroform? Something is wrong. There is only a latch fastening the door, I fancy. Shove against it with all your might. I’ll help.”

The door yielded to their strength. The slender iron latch snapped, the door flew suddenly open, and they found themselves confronted by a ghastly scene—a man seated at a table, his face buried in a blood-stained cloth—blood gushing from his arm, a pool of blood on the floor.

Fred uttered an exclamation of horror, and stood transfixed. Lottie made no outcry. She went swiftly to the man’s side and raised his unconscious head from the drug-saturated towel.

“It’s Hazard; he still lives, I hope,” she said, as she snatched a silk handkerchief from her neck and bound it tightly around his arm just above the wound. Then she knelt by him and pressed her finger upon the lacerated vein.

“Throw open a window, and run for a doctor,” she said to Fred.

He obeyed her at once. He was gone fully fifteen minutes; it seemed as many hours to the girl. She knelt there in a pool of blood, pressing her finger upon the cut vein, her eyes fixed on the death-like face that had dropped back on the table. Its pallor contrasted sharply with the blood splotches upon it. Blood! blood everywhere! Lottie’s heart sunk as she saw it. Could he live after losing so much of the life fluid? Oh! why did not the surgeon come?



As she watched the white face she saw a quiver come over it. Suddenly the eyes opened, and looked at her—wildly—then with dim recognition. He lifted his head, but it dropped again—dropped against her shoulder. She put one arm around him softly. She was afraid to move lest it should jar the lacerated vein and set it bleeding anew. As she knelt supporting his sinking weight with her strong arm, she held her breath to feel if the heart so close to hers still beat. When she distinguished its feeble pulsing, tears of joy sprung to her eyes.

And still the music played for the governor's ball, and the sound of the dancers' feet came across to the dreary room.

Twelve strokes clanged from the city clock. As the echo of the last one died away, Lottie heard the hollow sound of footsteps in the passage below. They began to ascend the stairs.

"It is Fred with the doctor—thank Heaven!" whispered Lottie. The next instant she heard Fred's voice, full of cheerful relief.

"Sis, you are here all right, are you? I felt bad to be away so long, but I had a time of it to get a doctor."

She scarcely heard him. She was watching the doctor's face, as he raised the unconscious head from her shoulder, looked at the would-be suicide and felt the pulse in his wrist, then put his hand over Hazard's heart.

"Now I will relieve you," he said to Lottie. "Turn that vein over to me and get up, my child. You are a brave little girl. You did just what was needed."

"But—was it done in time?" Lottie faltered.

"Yes—oh, yes! He has lost a good deal of blood, he will be quite weak for a few days, but he will soon come around."

Lottie wanted badly to cry, but she choked back the hysterical inclination and gave her attention to helping Dr. Blye. The half-severed vein was soon skillfully united and



bandaged. While this was being done Hazard recovered consciousness. He recognized the surgeon; he saw the blood, the bandaged arm, and comprehended that he had been saved from the consequences of his own desperate act.

“Why did you take this trouble, doctor?” he asked. “It would have been much better to let me die.”

“Humph!” growled the old surgeon. “That’s a grateful return for a man’s getting out of his bed to look after you such a night as this; a still poorer return for a nice young lady’s saving your life at the cost of a deuce of a cold and a pretty frock spoiled for good.”

“A young lady! Did Honor— Oh, no; it could be none but Lottie. Did I dream it? or did I see her kneeling by me?”

“You didn’t dream it—luckily for you. She was kneeling by you, sure enough, in a puddle of blood, holding back the life you had done your foolish best to let out. As I said, her pretty gown is spoiled, and she is booked for a sore throat.”

“Never mind the dress or the throat, Hazard,” said Lottie, coming to the side of the bed to which they had helped the boy. “I’m too glad to see you alive to think of anything else.”

She was blushing and laughing through her tears. She put her hand into the one that was feebly stretched out to her and he carried it to his lips.

“Doctor, he is quite cold; ought he not to have a stimulant?” she asked.

“I’m about to give him a little brandy. He’s got too much of this sort of stimulant in his system already, however. A bottle of hot water to his feet, a few mouthfuls of some light nourishment and a good sleep—that’s what he needs.”

Lottie, whirled about and took a hurried inventory of the room’s possibilities in the way of fire and food. Dame



Hubbard's traditionary cupboard was hardly more bare of eatables. A can of condensed milk more than half empty, on a shelf, was all that she discovered. And it was past midnight and raining hard. She looked at the cold, rusty little warming stove in the corner, and said to Fred:

"Make a fire, quick!"

He looked all about him carefully, saw neither coal nor wood, and said:

"Show me how to make something out of nothing, and I will."

"Don't make difficulties, dear," returned his sister. "Here's an old cigar-box and a blacking-brush and a political pamphlet—what better do you want to start with?—and I stumbled over a broken chair in the passage."

"Oh, fertile brain of woman," sighed Fred, preparing to break up the cigar-box. "I suppose she is going to make soup out of a hair-pin."

Lottie had found a large-sized empty tin can which she filled with water and set on the stove to boil as soon as the fire was kindled. Out of her pretty little satchel she took the half dozen Boston biscuits, wrapped in a white napkin, which she had meant to eat after the play with a glass of sherry contained in a little cut-glass bottle that had once held a heliotrope perfume. She would fill the can that held the remnant of condensed milk with hot water, give it a dash of sherry, pour it over the Boston biscuit and serve hot. It was the best she could do.

Soon the vessel on the stove was bubbling. She filled an empty bottle she had found with the hot water and gave it to Fred to put to her patient's feet, while she prepared the toast. When she brought it to his bed, steaming, she saw his eyes kindle, and she felt, with a pang, that he must have been suffering for lack of food. He eat with a relish it did her good to see; then he lay back on the pillow; she covered him as well as she could; the hot bottle at his feet was comforting; and in a few minutes he was asleep.



Lottie sat and watched by him. The doctor said good-night; Fred fell asleep in his chair; the music of the ball ceased; the rattle of vehicles in the muddy street and the dull monotone of the rain were the only sounds from without. Lottie sat and looked yearningly at the face on the pillow.

“Poor white, haggard face,” thought the girl. “How he must have suffered! Did that Montcalm woman break his heart, I wonder. Proud minx! He is good enough for her or any other lady in the land—handsome, bright fellow that he is. I hate her for treating him so. It’s just as though she had treated Fred or Charlie badly. I care for Hazard almost as I do for one of our boys.”

She knew in her heart that she cared more for him than for her brothers, fond as she was of them. She knew she loved the boy she watched so tenderly through this long night with that half-passionate, half-maternal tenderness and pity which a woman can feel for a man she does not wholly respect—a strong yearning impulse which sometimes saves its object and sometimes wreck the woman!

The sun was shining into the uncurtained room when Hazard opened his eyes upon the face of his little nurse. They were alone. Lottie had waked Fred and sent him on a variety of errands. First, to let Papa and Mamma Duck know what had become of their missing duckling. They were, no doubt, uneasy; but then they had confidence in Lottie and in her capability to take care of herself. Then, Fred was to order a delicious breakfast—coffee, oysters, eggs and broiled chicken—to be sent to Hazard’s room; also, a good nurse and a servant to clean up; lastly, a carriage to take Lottie back to the Marshall House, where she would undress, drink a hot sanger, cuddle up in bed and be as fresh for the matinée as though she had not watched all night over a would-be suicide and had her little heart torn with pity for him.

When he opened his eyes and saw her pale, thoughtful



little face (ready, though, to smile on him the instant their looks met), he said remorsefully:

“Oh, Lottie, you here still! You have not slept at all. What a wretch I am to subject you to all this! I am not worth it, Lottie. I don’t deserve anything.”

“Very likely. How many of us do deserve anything? But now let me bathe your face; your breakfast will be here soon.”

“What an angel of goodness and charity you are! It’s just charitable pity makes you come to look after me,” Hazard said with a twinge of his old proud repugnance to pity.

“Of course it is. I am such a famous Lady Samaritan. Now, sir, you know it’s not pity or charity that makes me come to look after you. It’s just a motherly solicitude. It’s a maternal weakness to care for wayward children.”

“But you don’t know how bad it is with me, Lottie. I am at the foot of the ladder. I can never rise any more. I have lost everything—friends, and place, and reputation, hope and talent, if I ever had any talent, which is doubtful.”

“You are an ungrateful boy to say so. You know you have got talent—yes, genius. Don’t shake your head, papa says so, and you’ll not deny that he is a good judge. You’ve got genius, and genius can always rise; if not rise in one way, then in another. As for your fall to the bottom of the ladder; why, it will do you good. You had mounted too fast; your head was giddy. The fall will bring you back to your good senses. It will shake the self-conceit out of you, and bring the manliness to the surface. Oh, it’s all right. ‘Never can rise again—hope all gone!’ Don’t let me hear such whining from you any more. Go back to your early teachings, sir. Don’t shame the curly headed boy that used to spout from Festus,

“‘Rouse thee, Heart!

Bow of my life, thou yet art full of spring,  
Thy quiver yet hath many purposes.’”



Lottie jumped up, threw out her pretty, bare, jeweled arm from the Mother Hubbard-looking wrap, and gave the lines in capital imitation of Hazard's boyish oratory.

He was obliged to smile, but the next moment, he said, drearily:

"It's all well enough in theory, but I'd just like to know how it is possible for me to rise without any lever of lucre or energy. I've gone now and drained myself of what little strength I had. What am I to do? No, Lottie, you ought to have let me complete last night's business."

"I'll give you a trial. If you disappoint me, why then you can make another attempt at your last night's performance. What are you to do? Why, in the first place, you are to lie right here and get back your strength through good food and good nursing. You shall have both, and you are not to worry yourself about the *how* of the matter."

"Which means I am to content myself with letting a woman pay for it out of her earnings. I'll not do it; I'll be hanged if—"

"Hush, if you please. Just wait. I am not going to *give* you anything out of my pocket. It's just an advance on your pay as second leading man in our troupe. That place is vacant, and papa wants you to fill it. He always said you were a born actor—and could beat Booth if you would. So you are to join us in a week. You'll be all right by that time. And now not another word. Be quiet and rest until your breakfast comes."

He obeyed, thanking her with a look and a kiss upon her little hand. He held the hand to his lips and lay silent. He was undergoing a transition. He saw, as in a dream, all his adventurous hopes go down in eternal shipwreck—his aspirations for literary fame, for political distinction, for wealth, Honor's proud face—all disappearing—gone—all but one little faithful hand to which he clung,



one love that had been his through all slights and coldness and change. Could he choose but love her? He had sworn once he would love her always. Had he ever really changed? He opened his beautiful, sorrowful eyes, and fastened them on the little actress.

“Lottie, there’s one chance for me. I can rise if I have one thing to hold to—*you*, Lottie, will you love me and take me, unworthy as I am, and help me to make a man of myself?”

She leaned over and kissed his lips.

“I accept the trust,” she said.

She remained an instant leaning over him, looking at him with her tender, yearning, tear-filled eyes. Then her quick ear caught the sound of footsteps. She stood up and dashed the drops from her brown lashes.

“Here comes your breakfast,” she cried cheerily.

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## CHAPTER LIV.

A BLEAK bitter day in December; the sky leaden-dark overhead, the earth white in its shroud of snow. It is the tenth anniversary of Kildee’s wedding, and she is passing it traveling across the snowy prairies of the North-west, in a railway train whose engine plunges panting and laboring through the heaped snow-drifts, while the engineer eyes the lowering sky, and mutters to the fireman that more snow is close at hand, and that the “devil will be to pay.” Inside the car, where Kildee sits, it is comfortable enough. The great stove midway the car glows red with heat; Kildee, tired of watching the monotonous expanse of snow outside, sings softly to the little child she holds in her arms, and lets her thoughts go back to the past.

Ten years since she became the bride of Max on the same starry December evening that her stately sister Honor gave her hand to Ira Heathcliff. The years have brought



changes. Governor Montcalm is dead. Heathcliff and Honor and their three lovely children occupy the ancestral home of the Montcalms. Heathcliff is now governor of the state, elected for a second term to that office.

The Red House is no longer gloomy. The only spirits that haunt it are two mischief-loving sprites who play tricks upon old Caleb as he sits nodding under the magnolias. The golden-tressed girl and the dark-haired boy are the children of David Holt and Laura.

Hazard Hall and Lottie are still itinerant *mimes*. She is as charming and merry as ever, and believes as fully in the genius of her handsome husband. He has not yet developed into a Booth, but he is a fascinating actor, if not a finished artist. He is exceedingly popular, and young girls pronounce him "glorious, divine," and write notes to beg his autograph. He boasts of his conquests sometimes, and teases his little wife until he makes the angry flash lighten through her tears; then he desists, and kisses the tears away.

"I can't help their loving me," he says, "and I can't help encouraging it—just a little; but you ought to know I love you and you only, Lottie."

He is Hazard Hall still.

The world says Kildee's marriage has been unfortunate. Max has made neither money nor fame. He set up his studio in New York—a little gem of a studio—for Governor Montcalm had bestowed a liberal check as his wedding-gift; but Max had not the steady application necessary to succeed where genius is wanting. He had no genuine love for his art; no deeply glowing aspirations to improve, to keep pace with the progressive thought and methods of the day. He had an easy-going sweet nature, a delicate taste in landscape painting and a repugnance to hard work. He was liked in society, caressed at his club, affectionate and lovable in his home. He was fond and proud of Kildee and she devoted herself to making him happy.



Was she happy herself? Did he satisfy her heart? Only one who knew her best, who watched her most anxiously, knew that she was not a happy wife. She fulfilled her wifely duties conscientiously. She was gentle and cheerful—sometimes merry; but the wistful look in her lovely eyes had deepened almost painfully. It told the story of a heart alone, in spite of intimate companionship, a soul that had not found its supplement. Kildee had her father's brow and eyes and her mother's nature. For all her delicate fineness there was a strong fiber in her that responded to the heroic. It was in her to understand and sympathize with great deeds; yes, to suggest and inspire such deeds by her elevated, fervid, emotional power and her strong pure imagination. It was this sympathy with the heroic that made her admire Heathcliff. She had not loved him so much as she had been moved by that commanding elevated chord in his character, which found an echo in her own nature.

She was hardly seventeen when she married Max. She knew she did not love him as she could love, but she was too young and untaught to feel the deep moral necessity that there should be perfect love between two beings whose lives are to be united by the close bond of marriage. She cared greatly for Max. She owed so much to him. He had been so kind as a guardian, so devoted as a lover, that she could not bear to hurt him by refusing to be his wife. But she had not given her consent until after she knew she was Governor Montcalm's daughter. When he had pressed her to marry him in the little town where they had stopped with the sick St. Peter, she had begged for time to think it over, and before the time allotted had gone by there came a letter from Lottie with the paper containing Nell Barnes's story. Max read it aloud to her as soon as the candles could be lighted. In the midst of his joy for her, she saw his face cloud. He had suddenly remembered that there was now a wide gulf between them.



He said, with a look of one who has received a stab:

“Now you will never think of poor Max.”

The girl's generous soul could not bear that look.

“How can you think so of me?” she cried; and a moment later she had promised to be his wife.

Having made the promise, she abided by it. She was firm under her father's representations, and unshaken by the brilliant prospect that had been opened to her. She married him; and he never knew that he did not perfectly fill her heart. A more spiritually sensitive nature might have felt the veil of uncongeniality that separated their lives, but Max was not spiritually sensitive. His was a sweet, sensuous, shallow nature, made to ripple pleasantly in the sunshine of easy fortune and social appreciation.

She outgrew him. It was inevitable. Her nature was richer in possibilities for development. When she went to New York, she came in contact, by reading, and, more rarely, by personal association, with strong minds, and she took deeper intellectual and spiritual root. It was natural this should seek to flower in expression. She had never been ready to reveal her deeper thoughts and feelings in speech. She was shy, for all her child-like frankness. So the form of expression she chose was writing. She began to write poems, at first for her own eye, afterward she confided her secret to a friend—a warm-hearted and large-brained woman—connected with the New York press, and through this friend's persuasions, the poems appeared in print, from time to time, under the pseudonym of Alfar Weir. They were always short—sonnets or lyrics, characterized by a delicate, yet sinewy imagination, a crystallization of thought, a glow of passionately pure feeling which laid hold upon a small but intellectual and appreciative class of readers. To some of these it became known that she was the author of the poems they admired, and so she made for herself a narrow but congenial circle of friends.



Into this circle Max often came with her in person, but did not truly belong to it. He had no affinity with it.

Kildee's work and her associations satisfied the demands of her intellectual being, and her heart found an outlet in love for her child. It was a fragile little creature, with dark, asking eyes like its mother's. From the first, the tenderest care had been required to foster its delicate life. Kildee had given it that care. She was almost morbid in her devotion. She hung over the little one, day and night, till she became worn and pale, and seemed to be hourly giving a portion of her life to eke out the fragile existence of her child. Notwithstanding this untiring care, the little one faded. One day in April its life went out. The mother's grief, though it was almost silent, was passionately deep. With the dropping off of this frail flower her life had borne, that life seemed to have lost all its sweetness. The temptation was strong to let go the bare, blossomless bough and drop into the grave beside her child.

Her friends rallied around her. One of them took her to hear a preacher whose talk, it was said, had the Christ-like power of giving comfort and strength. She had heard much of this preacher since she had been in New York. She had often wanted to hear him speak, for he was one she had known in years past. This eccentric speaker, bold writer and spiritual teacher, after the apostolic pattern, was no other than Miles Carleon. She had heard of him as strangely eloquent—with the eloquence of fervid zeal in his crusade against wrong, and of passionate pity and love for men. She had heard of the self-denying life he led—the severe asceticism of his habits, his devoted labors in prisons and penitentiaries and hospitals—among the poor, the sick, the sorrowing and sinful. In the cause of helping his fellow-beings to a happier and higher physical and moral life, he spared neither personal effort nor money. Not only had he given Aphrodite Island, with its costly buildings and improvements, as a home for orphans, but



he had established and endowed other charities. He had invested all his remaining fortune judiciously, and he was spending all the interest and portions of the principal in the work into which he had thrown his life. He was after the apostolic type. He sought neither fame nor money. He took no pay, he asked no favors, he courted no popular applause, he belonged to no denomination. He owed no allegiance to any church. He fenced in his broad creed of faith and deeds by no bristling hedge of theological tenets. Therefore, he could be independent. He could be bold for truth, and strong for truth. And he was. He assailed sin that sat in high places. He denounced wrong that cloaked itself under specious pretenses. He withered the masks of hypocrisy, the sheep's clothing of human wolves and foxes, with his fiery satire. No St. John was he—rather a Paul of Tarsus. No Gabriel—rather a Michael with sword of fire. His voice of bold rebuke rang out against political crime; against gilded social debasement; against banded corporations—licensed robbers.

The object of his denouncing writhed under his blows; shrunk at his unflinching exposure of their wrong-doing. He made enemies by the score. They decried him in the press. They called him a fanatic—a lunatic. Ministers assailed him in the pulpit as unorthodox and irregular. He heeded them not. He went on in his crusade against wrong. Persecution only whetted his sword. His trumpet rang out more defiantly for the charge.

And yet he was the soul of love, of pity and tolerance. He had tender compassion for the weak and fallen, for he knew the strength of temptation. He had sounded the depths of sin and suffering. He was fitted to talk to criminals in prison and convict camps, and his work was often there. He was fitted to comfort and encourage the sorrowing, for he had drank of the bitter cup.

It was to this man that Kildee's friend took her in the dark days that followed the death of her child. She had



met him more than once since her coming to New York. There was a look in his eyes that thrilled that chord in her which responded sympathetically to the heroic. There was the look of one who had fought and had conquered. Looking back she recalled him as she had known him. She saw him in the light of his new developed character, and she felt that she had been right, when she told him that last night at Aphrodite that he could be a power for good as he had been a power for evil. She had uttered the words through a kind of inspired impulse. They had proved prophetic.

She knew all that he had renounced. She remembered his social accomplishments, his powers of fascination, the homage of his satellites, his fastidious, pleasure-loving nature. Could she fail to remember how he had loved her?—how desperately he had sought to make amends for the wrong he had tried to do her? He had saved her life—at what fearful cost to himself she was reminded every time she saw him. That terrible crushing fall had left its trace. A slight lameness clung to him; a deep scar showed redly on his white temple.

She went to hear him once and again; she caught the infection of his zeal. His eloquence took her out of herself. She was caught up in the fiery chariot of his impassioned love for his kind, his thirst to do them good, to win them to his side in the fight.

He came to see her. His clear eyes read her secret. He knew that her heart was solitary. He had feared so from her poems. He alone felt the meaning of that under-tone of sadness there was in them.

He said to her, “You need work.”

“Give me some of your work,” she answered. And so he took her among those she could help—children starved in body and soul, women bowed with ill health and neglect, and the memory of past sins; miserable and forsaken ones to whom a word of kindness came as the sweetest sur-



prise. She had a comprehending sympathy with such people; she was so patient, so simple, so kind, with no shadow of patronizing. She was so winningly helpful in small household ways of sick-bed attendance and care of children and preparing of food, that she did more good than she knew. He watched her little ways—child-like and winsome as of old, and yet with that unconscious dignity that had amused and charmed him then—he watched her, and he said to himself as he had said before, “She is a pearl above price—and I lost her.”

They talked only about her work, about books and the new thoughts that were born in the brains of progressive men, and the schemes for the good of humanity that were fermenting in other minds beside his own. She looked up to him with loving reverence. Here was a hero worthy to bend the head before—such a hero as the age demanded. She would have deemed it sacrilege to remember, save as a past unmeaning dream, that this man who seemed enthroned above human weakness had once loved her. It was a mere flickering passion flame, she thought, long ago eclipsed in the white light of religious philosophy. She underrated her power of holding the heart of a man; she underrated the strength of the passion she had inspired. Men like Carleon have tenacity as well as strength of feeling. His love for this sweet child-woman whose deep soul he had instinctively probed was the passion of his life. It had been subdued, held in check, not killed. No mortal man can crush a strong feeling utterly under the heel of his will. Only by repeated struggles, eternal watchfulness, is victory won.

Carleon had sought to do the woman he loved a kindness; he did himself a hurt. He realized it, and made his resolve. Strong as he was, he dared not stay and face this temptation. He left the city suddenly. He went to the far North-west—a self-sent missionary to the Indians. From time to time Kildee heard through the papers of his



great work among the poor savages. Occasionally she saw his name appended to earnest appeals in behalf of the Indians—to bold rebukes of the injustice done them. He espoused their cause against their oppressors—against their pretended friend—the Government.

He wrote of their needs, their wrongs, the cruelty that drove them from their valley homes, where they had planted their fields, had built their cottages, and churches and school-houses, and were making pathetic efforts to become civilized and to rear their children in more enlightened ways. Through the grasping covetousness of the white man, with his Government backing, the poor creatures were driven from these beloved settlements in the more fertile valleys, and forced to fly with what they could take, and herd upon some bleak rocky spot of inhospitable plain or hill-side, shelterless and heart-broken.

Carleon depicted the wrongs of this savage race, and their sins which had grown out of these wrongs. He denounced the villainy of agents sent among them to swindle and plunder, and to demoralize them with liquor.

Kildee read his vivid words with eager sympathy. She missed him sorely. More than once she thought of writing to him, but she could not venture to do this. In his short note of farewell he had not asked her to write—had given her no address—had said he would be as nomadic as Noah's raven.

Once she went to hear a lecture by a man who had been traveling and sojourning on the Pacific coast. He spoke of Carleon—of his self-denying life—how, with all his accomplishments, his social and intellectual gifts, his still large fortune, he yet lived in rigid simplicity among far-off wilds, with a savage uncongenial people, for the sole sake of doing good to that people, through the sole motive of love and pity.

“The man is sublime,” said the lecturer. “He is a hero, to whom Napoleon is a pygmy. When he dies in



that far-off land, let it be said of him, as of one not so great:

“ ‘Lay not a laurel crown, but lay a sword  
Upon his lonely grave, for he has fought  
Alone against a host  
At his far, frontier post,  
Nor rest nor love nor pleasure has he sought.’ ”

As Kildee listened she found herself sobbing. Life was harder to her now. Her home-life was overshadowed. Max had failed in the business speculations he had undertaken. The money lost had been hers. It had come to her from her father's estate. It was all swept away. She did not reproach him by a look—instead she comforted him with loving, encouraging words. But he was soured with disappointment. These sweet, weak natures easily sour when things go wrong. Max had tasted the novel intoxicating cup of prosperity, the gratification of being thought a man of means, the sensuous delight of surrounding himself with pretty luxuries and being liked and caressed in society. He keenly resented the loss of these. That they were lost through his own lack of judgment made him only more bitter. He returned to his studio, but he had poor success. His old genial, bright manner was gone. He did not attract. He had never excelled as a painter, and now his hand seemed to have lost its cunning. He had failed to follow Art with loving faithfulness and now she took her revenge.

It became a struggle with them to live. Their pretty house was given up, their furniture sold and the money spent in paying board. Max would not apply to Kildee's relatives, for they had lent him money before and he had used it to buoy the sinking enterprises he had invested in. He determined to go to his aunt in North Minnesota. She was well off and she liked him. She had helped him more than once before his marriage. He had not the sturdy in-



dependence that scorns assistance. He was quite willing to be helped.

He went, taking Kildee with him, and the little child that had been born to them during the past year. But to his disgust he found his aunt on the point of marrying again and wholly taken up with her prospective husband and his children. After a short stay they set out to return to New York. They were on their way there this December day.

Such a drear, wild day! The level, treeless stretch of land was one vast expanse of snow: the wind blew icily, the sky lowered in masses of leaden clouds. There was every sign of a fresh snow-storm.

In a little while it began. It increased steadily in violence; the air was filled with whirling, blinding flakes; the track was buried more and more deeply under the white drift; the engine panted more laboriously as it plowed through the deepening mass, the train moved more slowly, and the impatience and anxiety of the passengers momentarily increased.

Night approached, and still the snow-storm continued. At length it became evident that the train could not proceed. In vain the engine labored, struggled, groaned like some living giant. In vain coal was piled under the boiler and steam crowded up till the safety-valves gave warning. The train refused to move. It was snowed up.

The night came down, and with its coming the snow ceased to fall, and the wind took up the cruel story. A bitter wind. The pitiless soul of the polar regions was in its breath. The thermometer fell rapidly; the cold increased every moment. The passengers began to complain that the car was uncomfortable.

“Put more coal in the stove,” was the cry, and the request was not promptly obeyed. Presently a fearful rumor began to circulate; there was but little coal left upon the train. It had been used too lavishly in trying to force the engine through the snow.



Before midnight the coal had entirely given out. The suffering began to be great. The crying of children, the querulous exclamations of women and the muttered ejaculations of men were heard. The cold became intense.

“Burn the seats!” cried one, and the words were taken up. The appeal was made to the conductor; he ordered an ax to be brought, and soon half a dozen seats were broken and split to pieces and the fragments crammed into the stove. As they burned, more seats were made into fuel to feed the fire and impart a warmth to the half-frozen occupants of the car. The seats were all destroyed, the passengers crowded around the stove, pushing each other, in the efforts to get near it, the selfish element coming out, as it does always in a time of peril. Kildee clasped her child to her bosom and stood silent and suffering. She had taken off her warm shawl to wrap about the little one. She looked anxiously at Max. His health was delicate. Disappointment and anxiety had worn upon him. She felt glad that his overcoat was thick and new. She had knotted her fur boa around his neck to protect his throat. He wanted to take the child, but she would not let him. He seemed to feel the cold intensely. He was blue and trembling. His suffering made him selfish, almost to indifference. He hardly noticed that some rough men were crowding her back from the stove. He made a feeble remonstrance, a weak attempt to oppose the elbows and shoulders that pushed her and her child as well as himself away from the life-saving heat: then he gave up and let the half-drunken roughs have their will.

The door of the car opened and shut quickly. A man had entered. One glance at his strong, calm face made Kildee's fast congealing blood stir with a quickened motion; it was Carleon, journeying back eastward, through some impulse too strong to resist. His face inspired hope. “He may help us,” was Kildee's dreamy thought, “or at least, he will take care of my child.”



She sat where she had sunk upon the floor, and Max sat helplessly by her. Carleon saw them. He made his way to her side. He lifted her quickly to her feet. He spoke to her almost sharply; he felt she must be roused.

“Give me the child and drink this,” he said. He put the baby on his arm and put the flask containing brandy to Kildee’s lips.

“Drink,” he said, and she obeyed him. But her faculties were fast becoming paralyzed. He handed the flask to Max, and with a few words of stern command, a vigorous sweeping of his arms, he cleared a way through the men to the stove, which still radiated a little heat. He wore a long cloak lined throughout with the gray fur of the Rocky Mountain fox. He took it off, and putting the baby in her arms, wrapped both in the warm cloak, paying no heed to her remonstrances.

“I am used to the cold,” he said cheerily. “I have weathered many a norther on the plains. Never mind me.” He made a place for Max beside Kildee, where she sat near the stove. Then he stood by them with arms folded over his chest, and talked cheerfully, glanced from topic to topic, trying to keep them awake and animated. The brandy had made Max rally a little, but he still seemed to suffer greatly.

The long night hours went by. The fuel was exhausted—the stove cold long before help arrived; it came at last. As the morning dawned clear and bright over the waste of snow, the strong engine with a supply of coal, which had been telegraphed for, came to their assistance. It arrived too late for some. Several were frost-bitten—others had incipient inflammation of the lungs. Among these last was Max. He was attacked with pneumonia. He was taken to the next station, a railroad village, put to bed in the best room of the little hotel and a physician summoned. For days he lay ill unto death, nursed by Kildee with devoted tenderness and attended by a skillful physi-



cian from Indianapolis, whom Carleon had summoned by telegraph.

“Stay with him. You shall not lose by giving him all your attention,” Carleon said to the doctor, who was his friend. The attentive nursing, the skillful treatment, seemed about to achieve a victory. Max grew better; then was willfully imprudent, relapsed, and was soon past hope. Just as the stars came out in the pale sky of the Christmas-eve, while the sunset after-glow yet flushed the waste of snow, the life of Max Rubin went out, his last look resting on the face of the wife he loved.

They carried him back to the home of his early years and laid him beside his mother—his father slept by the arrowy Rhone in “Vaterland.”

Carleon attended to everything. He left Kildee alone with her grief. The child would be her best comforter. After the funeral he was surprised to hear of Kildee’s intention to go to New York. He had thought she would go to her sister in the South. Had he known the indebtedness to Heathcliff which poor unbusiness-like Max had incurred he would have understood Kildee’s reluctance to accept the warm invitation that she should come to them at once.

She went to New York to the house in which she and Max had boarded before that ill-starred journey to the Pacific. Carleon parted from her at the wharf directly he had seen her ashore and procured a carriage for her. She gave him her hand from the carriage window and thanked him as she had done before.

“I will communicate with you on a business matter as soon—as soon as I can,” she said.

Her manner seemed to him reserved, even cold. “She is remembering my old sins,” he thought sadly, as he turned away. He did not know the intricacies of woman’s nature. He did not understand that she was blaming herself remorsefully for not having loved Max more devotedly. She had not failed once in her outward duties; but in her



heart she was conscious that she had not been able to accord him that perfect love, that proud, trustful looking-up to which was her ideal of wifely duty.

Carleon saw her no more to speak to for two weeks. He hesitated to intrude upon her grief while it was new, but he was troubled about her future. If she did not go to her relations how would she live? He had gathered from Max, during his interval of improvement, that he was without means. Every day he walked or rode by the house that held her and her child, but he rarely had a glimpse of her. One day he saw her come out closely veiled and drive to a jeweler's shop. When she went into the shop she had a package in her hand; when she came out she no longer had it. Carleon waited until she had driven away, and then went into the shop. The jeweler and his clerk were examining a set of beautiful pearls—just bought, they told him. He asked permission to look at them. Inside, on the gold setting of each piece he saw the engraved initials of Kildee's maiden name. It was her father's gift to her on the evening of his inauguration ball. She had needed money badly, Carleon knew, or she would not have parted with it.

He bought the jewels; he would find a way to restore them to her some time. Leaving the box at the jeweler's he went to her boarding-house and asked to see her. She came in at once.

"I am glad you came," she said as she sat near him. "I wanted to see you to ask if you would kindly make out a statement of the expenses for—for everything. I wanted to pay it."

(So it was to get money to defray the expenses of her husband's illness and burial that she had sold her pearls.)

"I will send you the bills," Carleon said, "with the receipts attached."

"Receipts?"

"Yes, everything has been paid. I had money in my



possession belonging to your husband. I bought some pictures from him which he had hung in a gallery here. The money they brought paid for everything with a little balance over—some three hundred dollars, which I have taken the liberty to put in the bank to your account.”

“Oh! Mr. Carleon, the pictures were not worth so much—not nearly so much. I can not—”

“It was a business transaction,” said Carleon conclusively. “Doctor Simms was witness to it. I have the order for the pictures signed by your husband. Now, will you not tell me your plans? I have no right to ask, but—”

“Yes, you have the right—the right of my friend—my good friend. I can never forget your kindness to him and me. I am going to stay here and try to earn a living by writing; oh, not poetry. I know writing poetry would not bring me bread. I am going to do newspaper work for the ‘Times.’ Mr. Wentworth is an old friend. I have written for him before, things that pleased him, and he will try me now on a little salary—enough to support me.”

“Are you sure you are strong enough for it?”

“Oh, yes; I am never ill. It will do me good.”

He looked doubtingly at her little pale face, worn by nursing and anxiety. He was afraid she would see in his eyes the strong yearning that came over him. He walked to the other end of the room, then came back to where she sat.

“I am going away,” he said; “going back to the Pacific coast. If at any time I can render you the service of a friend, will you let me know? I beg you to believe how gladly I would render such service.”

“I do believe it,” she answered.

He took her hand in his, looked with grave tenderness into her eyes, and said:

“God keep you, dear child; good-bye.”

It was nearly a year before she saw him again. It was a busy year to her. The work was new to her; she tried hard



to make it wholly satisfactory. And in the intervals of her newspaper labors she began to write a book. The work and the care of her child and some anxious thoughts wore upon her. Her face lost a little of its perfect oval; her dark, sweet eyes had a weary look. Christmas-eve, as the twilight fell, she was seated in her tiny sitting-room, beside the glowing grate. She had been writing, but had laid down her pen to look at a pretty picture—her child asleep on the deep, warm-colored rug before the fire—a flaxen-haired doll in one arm, the other around the neck of the pretty, shaggy white dog that was also coiled up and comfortably napping.

“Come in,” Kildee said as a rap came upon the door. She thought it was the servant with her tea. She started up when she saw the broad-shouldered figure and strong brown-bearded face. She came to meet him, with flushed cheek and outstretched hands. He held her hand and looked down at her face.

“The work has not been good for you after all,” he said.

“Do not decry your own prescription,” she answered smiling. “Once you said to me: ‘You need work,’ and I have found it a tonic and a panacea.”

“May I change the prescription?” he asked, still holding her hand and looking into her eyes. “I said then, ‘you need work;’ may I say now, ‘you need love and love’s tender care’? May I give them to you, Kildee? My own, my one love, I need you more than I can tell.”

Her answer satisfied his heart.

THE END.



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379	Home as Found. (Sequel to "Homeward Bound").....	20
380	Wyandotte; or, The Huttet Knoll.....	20
385	The Headsman; or, The Ab-baye des Vignerons.....	20
394	The Bravo.....	20
397	Lionel Lincoln; or, The Leag-uer of Boston.....	20
400	The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish... ..	20
413	Afloat and Ashore.....	20
414	Miles Wallingford. (Sequel to "Afloat and Ashore").....	20
415	The Ways of the Hour.....	20
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420	Satanstoe; or, The Littlepage Manuscripts.....	20
421	The Redskins; or, Indian and Injin. Being the conclusion of the Littlepage Manuscripts ..	20
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424	Mercedes of Castile; or, The Voyage to Cathay.....	20
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450	Godfrey Helstone.....	20
606	Mrs. Hollyer.....	20

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260	Proper Pride.....	10
412	Some One Else.....	20

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619	Joy; or, The Light of Cold-Home Ford.....	20
647	Goblin Gold.....	10

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574	The Nabob: A Story of Parisian Life and Manners.....	20

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24	Pickwick Papers. Vol. II.....	20
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447	American Notes.....	20
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456	Sketches by Boz. Illustrative of Every-day Life and Every-day People.....	20
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679	Where Two Ways Meet.....	10

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82	Sealed Lips.....	20
104	The Coral Pin. 1st half.....	20
104	The Coral Pin. 2d half.....	20
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328	Babiole, the Pretty Milliner. Second half.....	20
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699	The Sculptor's Daughter. 2d half.....	20
782	The Closed Door. 1st half.....	20
782	The Closed Door. 2d half.....	20

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2	Molly Bawn.....	20
6	Portia .....	20
14	Airy Fairy Lilian.....	10
16	Phyllis.....	20
25	Mrs. Geoffrey.....	20
29	Beauty's Daughters.....	10
30	Faith and Unfaith.....	20



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118 Loys, Lord Berresford, and Eric Dering.....	10
119 Monica, and A Rose Distill’d... ..	10
123 Sweet is True Love.....	10
129 Rossmoyne.....	10
134 The Witching Hour, and Other Stories.....	10
136 “That Last Rehearsal,” and Other Stories.....	10
166 Moonshine and Marguerites....	10
171 Fortune’s Wheel, and Other Stories.....	10
284 Doris.....	10
312 A Week in Killarney; or, Her Week’s Amusement.....	10
342 The Baby.—One New Year’s Eve	10
390 Mildred Trevanion.....	10
404 In Durance Vile, and Other Stories.....	10
486 Dick’s Sweetheart.....	20
494 A Maiden All Forlorn, and Barbara.....	10
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771 A Mental Struggle.....	20
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808	King Arthur. Not a Love Story	20

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695	Hearts: Queen, Knave, and Deuce.....	20
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528	At His Gates.....	20
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604	Innocent. 2d half.....	20
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239	Signa.....	20
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477	Affinities.....	10

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464	The Newcomes. Part II.....	20
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670	The Rose and the Ring. Illus- trated.....	10

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142	Jenifer.....	20
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200	An Old Man's Love.....	10
531	The Prime Minister. 1st half..	20
531	The Prime Minister. 2d half..	20
621	The Warden.....	10
622	Harry Heathcote of Gangoil... 10	
667	The Golden Lion of Granpere..	20
700	Ralph the Heir. 1st half.....	20
700	Ralph the Heir. 2d half.....	20

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298	Mitchelhurst Place.....	10
586	"For Percival".....	20

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87	Dick Sand; or, A Captain at Fifteen.....	20
100	20,000 Leagues Under the Seas.	20
368	The Southern Star; or, the Dia- mond Land. ....	20
395	The Archipelago on Fire.....	10
578	Mathias Sandorf. Illustrated. Part I. ....	10
578	Mathias Sandorf. Illustrated. Part II.....	10
578	Mathias Sandorf. Illustrated. Part III.....	20
659	The Waif of the "Cynthia"...	20

**L. B. Walford's Works.**

241	The Baby's Grandmother.....	10
256	Mr. Smith: A Part of His Life.	20
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658	The History of a Week.....	10

**F. Warden's Works.**

192	At the World's Mercy.....	20
248	The House on the Marsh.....	10
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275	The Three Brides.....	10
535	Henrietta's Wish. A Tale.....	10
563	The Two Sides of the Shield....	20
640	Nuttie's Father.....	20
665	The Dove in the Eagle's Nest..	20
666	My Young Alcides: A Faded Photograph.....	20
739	The Caged Lion.....	20
742	Love and Life.....	20

**Miscellaneous.**

53	The Story of Ida. Francesca..	10
61	Charlotte Temple. Mrs. Row- son.....	10
99	Barbara's History. Amelia B. Edwards.....	20
103	Rose Fleming. Dora Russell..	10
105	A Noble Wife. John Saunders	20
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751	Great Voyages and Great Navi- gators. Second half.....	20

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666	My Young Alcides: A Faded Photograph .....	20
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800	Hopes and Fears; or, Scenes from the Life of a Spinster. Second half.....	20

**Miscellaneous.**

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61	Charlotte Temple. Mrs. Row- son.....	10
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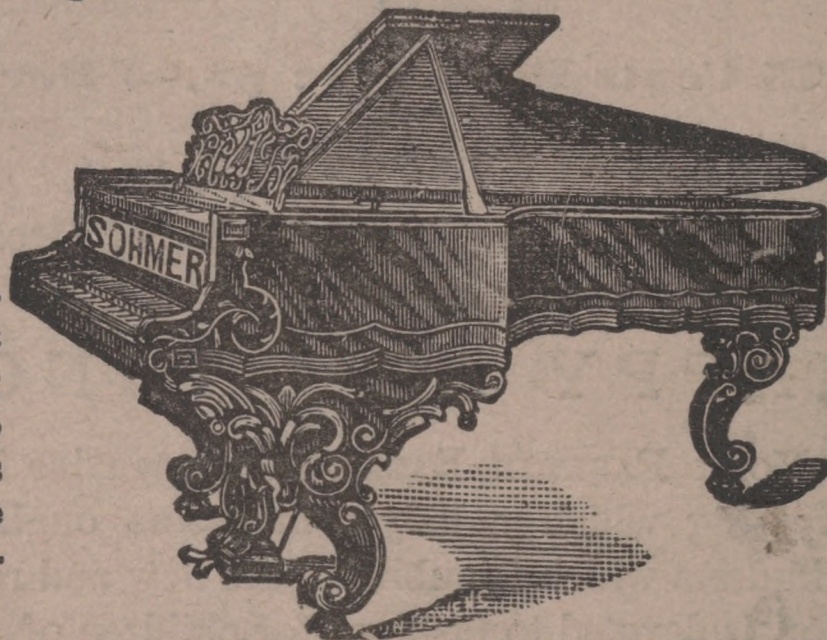
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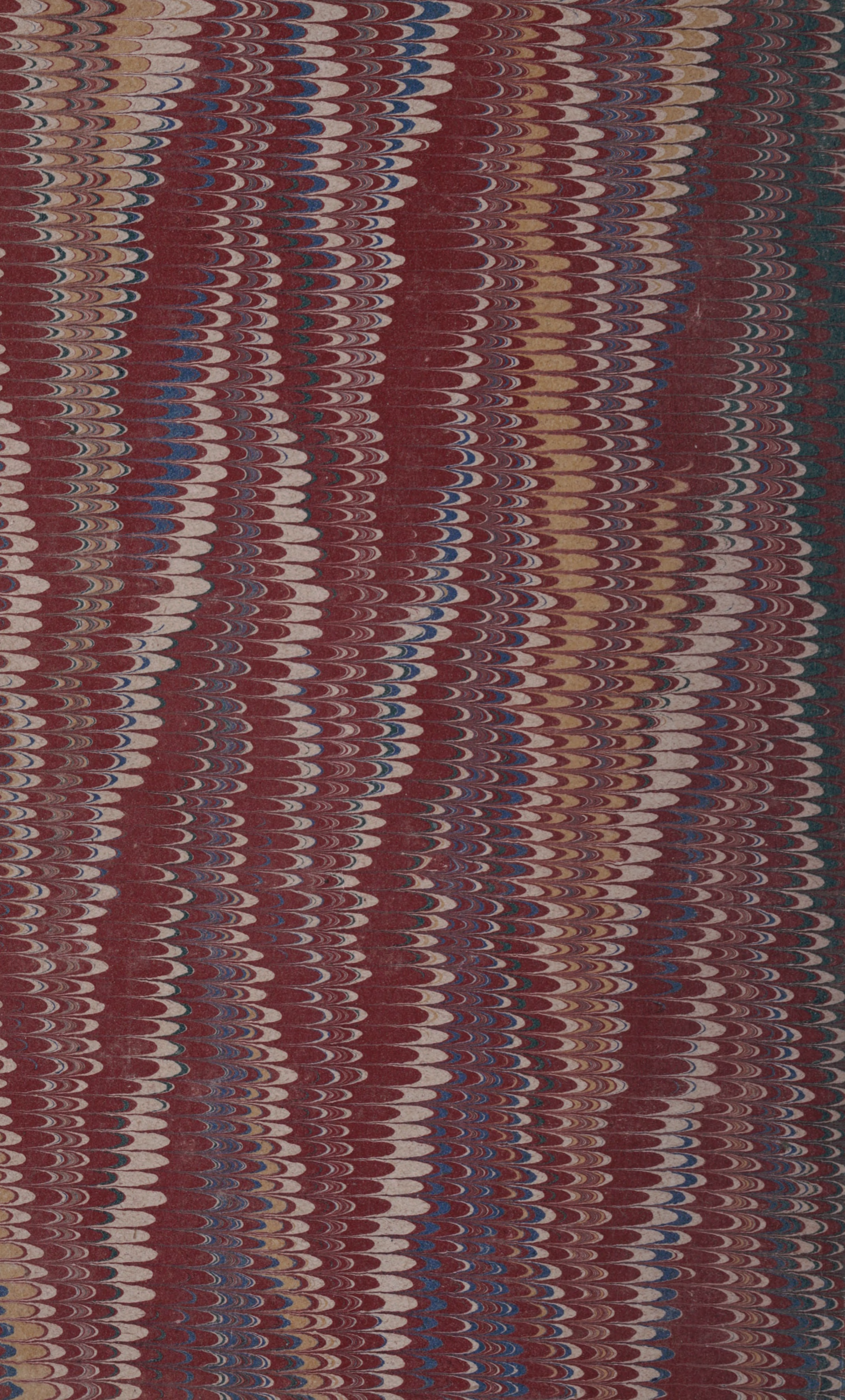


















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